

MANZIKERT 1071

The breaking of Byzantium



DAVID NICOLLE

ILLUSTRATED BY CHRISTA HOOK

CAMPAIGN • 262

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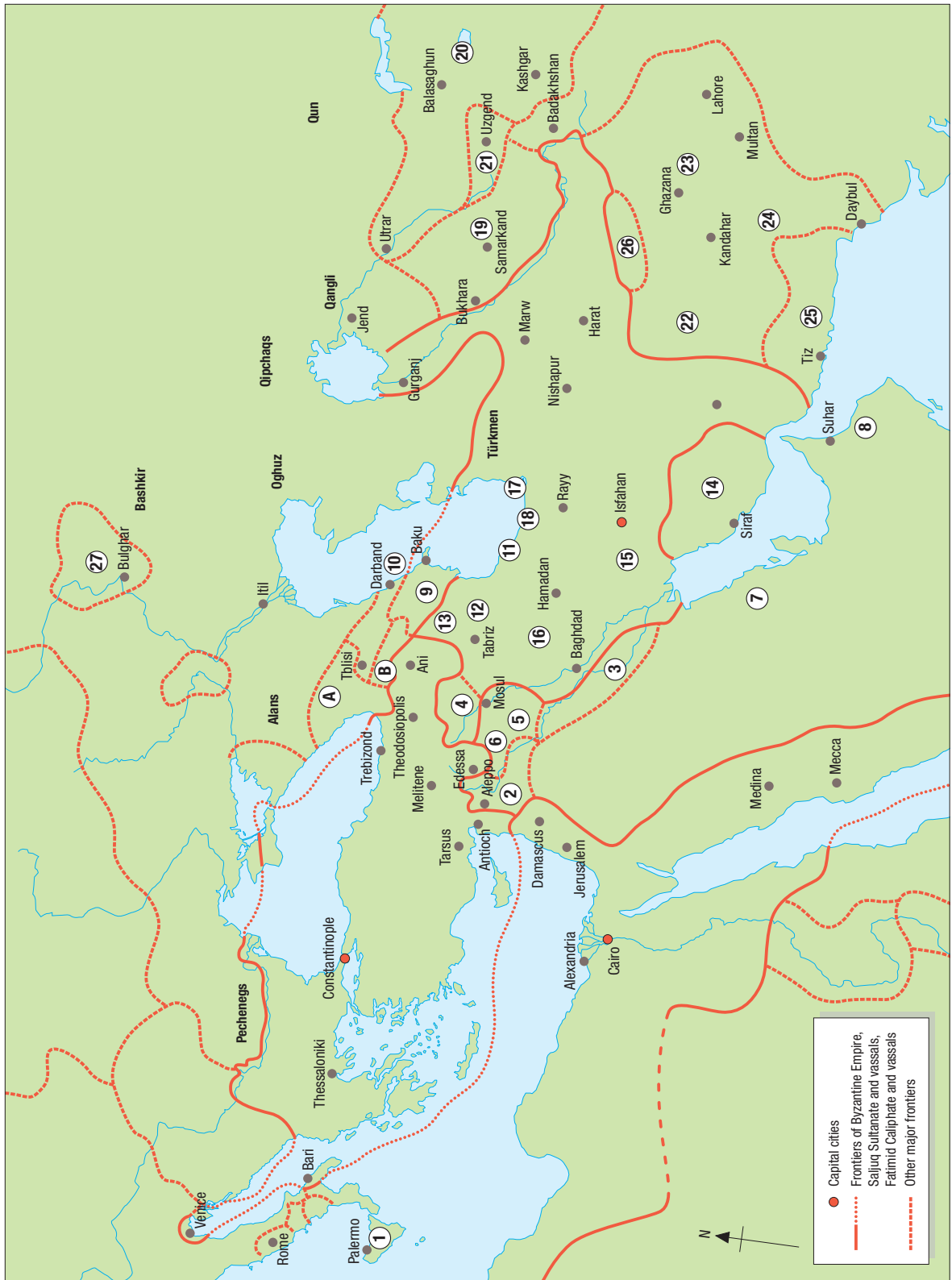
DAVID NICOLLE

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Series editor Marcus Cowper

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Empires, nomads and merchants



ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The battle of Manzikert in 1071 is widely regarded as one of the most significant turning points in medieval history. More recently, some historians have downgraded its importance, noting that it was not the defeat of a Byzantine army by a Saljuq Islamic army which opened the Byzantine Empire to Turkish conquest, but the Byzantine civil war that followed that defeat. Meanwhile western historians still tend to present the battle of Manzikert as the culmination of a Turco-Islamic assault upon the Byzantine bulwark of a Christian world struggling for survival against an Islamic threat. The reality was far more complex.

Byzantine civilization had its roots in both the Graeco-Roman and Early Christian pasts. Its people believed themselves to be under divine protection while their leaders were doing God's work in this world. As a result, their Orthodox Christianity was central to their identity. Referring to themselves as Romaioi or Romans and their state as the New or Second Rome, the Byzantines' clear sense of superiority annoyed several of their neighbours. Many foreign peoples who had been forcibly settled within the Empire by earlier Byzantine emperors had, by the 11th century, been Byzantinized. Only on the peripheries did non-Greek-speaking, non-Orthodox Christian peoples predominate numerically. In the east these included Armenians, Syrians, Kurds, Arabs, Georgians and perhaps Laz.

Meanwhile the Byzantine Empire's relations with its western neighbours had a profound impact on the events leading up to the battle of Manzikert,

- 1 Sicily under local *qadis* (judges).
 - 2 Mirdasids.*
 - 3 Mazyadids.*
 - 4 Marwanids, Saljuq vassal since 1056. **S**
 - 5 'Uqaylids.*
 - 6 Numayrids (probably changed allegiance from Fatimid to 'Abbasid Caliphate in 1060).
 - 7 Qarmati (Shi'a but not recognising Fatimid Caliphate).*
 - 8 Ibadi Imams (Saljuqs apparently controlled the Omani coast after 1054).
 - 9 Sharwan Shahs.
 - 10 Hashimids.
 - 11 Musafirids (Shi'a but vassals of Saljuq Sultanate).*
 - 12 Rawwadids (Saljuq vassals since 1054). **S**
 - 13 Shaddadids (Saljuq vassals since reign of Tughril Beg). **S**
 - 14 Buwayhids (Shi'a but not recognising the Fatimid Caliphate).*
 - 15 'Annazids. **S** (probably)
 - 16 Kakuyids (Saljuq vassals since 1051). **S**
 - 17 Bawandids (Shi'a but recognising Saljuq overlordship). **S**
 - 18 Ziyarids (Saljuq vassals probably since c.1041). **S**
 - 19 Western Qarakhanids.
 - 20 Eastern Qarakhanids.
 - 21 Qarakhanids of Farghana (suzereinty varying between the Eastern and Western Qarakhanids).
 - 22 Maliks (vassals of Ghaznawids).
 - 23 Ghaznawids.
 - 24 Khudardar (vassals of Ghaznawids).
 - 25 Makran (in revolt against Ghaznawids since 1029).
 - 26 Ghurids (vassals of Ghaznawids).
 - 27 Volga Bulgars.
- Other Christian states**
- A** Georgia. +
B Armenian Lori-Tashir.
- S** vassal of Saljuqs
* Shi'a or normally supporting the Fatimid Caliphate
+ vassal of the Byzantine Empire

In the 11th century Christians were a substantial community within the Islamic regions bordering the Byzantine Empire. Today they are a small minority but several medieval monasteries and churches still exist, including the Tahira Church at Qaraqush, near Mosul. (Author's photograph)



The carvings on an Armenian church on Aght'amar Island in Lake Van date from a century before the battle of Manzikert, but they shed light on the costume and equipment of this region when it was ruled by independent Armenian kings. (Author's photograph)



and even more so on the events that followed. Although the Great Schism between the eastern Orthodox and the western Catholic Churches dates from the year 1054, it was as yet merely a theological dispute between senior churchmen. Indeed westerners were widely admired in Byzantium for their simple piety and military prowess, being widely welcomed as military recruits.

The events surrounding the battle of Manzikert focused upon the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire, in what is now Turkey. Here the Byzantine authorities continued the long-standing Romano-Byzantine policy of forcible population movement as a means of strengthening the Empire's defence. Hence, between the 7th and 11th centuries, large numbers of people had been brought in from Europe, the Middle East and the Eurasian Steppes. In other cases unreliable elements had been moved out of Anatolia, for example, to Thrace where there was already a substantial Armenian community.

In many cases these transfers had a religious motivation, the Imperial government being particularly concerned about perceived heresy in vulnerable frontier regions bordering the Islamic world. On the other hand minor theological differences were usually tolerated, if only because their followers numbered millions. For example, in the 10th and 11th centuries Monophysites who maintained that Jesus Christ had 'one nature which was both human and divine', included the Armenian and the largely Arabic-speaking Syriac Churches. In contrast the Nestorian Church, which maintained that Jesus Christ had 'two natures, one human and one divine' remained unacceptable. Instead Nestorians found sanctuary under Islamic rule where their doctrines were closer to those of Muslims, who regarded Jesus as a 'divinely inspired man' – in other words a prophet.



The persecution of more extreme heresies continued. They included the Paulician sect, which was brutally suppressed by the Byzantine authorities before briefly reappearing in the Eastern Euphrates Valley where the Manzikert campaign would later be fought. At the start of the 11th century a related sect called the T'ondrakeci was still recorded, many of its surviving remnants fleeing to Islamic territory where some of its followers, the supposedly 'sun worshipping' Areworik' fought for Damascus during the 12th century.

Armenians were, of course, central to the story of the battle of Manzikert. Early medieval Armenian society was not urbanized and the existing towns were Greek foundations, which, after being used as Roman garrison centres, had flourished under early Islamic rule. These and newly established towns had attracted Muslim settlers as well as garrisons, almost all under the control of Arab *amirs* rather than an Armenian *naxarar* aristocracy who were themselves vassals of the 'Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad. Amongst these new centres were Manzikert, Ahlat, Archech [Erçiş] and Perkri [Muradiye], which would feature in the events around 1071.

During this prolonged period of Islamic domination, Armenians had sometimes fought in support of their Muslim overlords, or in support of the Byzantine Empire, or in attempts to regain Armenian independence. Their homeland straddled the mountainous frontier between the Byzantine and early medieval Islamic worlds, a frontier which remained largely unchanged from the 8th to 10th centuries. Here the frontier zone has been described as a virtually depopulated no man's land rather than a line on a map. It generally followed the crests of hills but was also defined by the possession of fortresses while the main population centres generally lay at some distance on either side.

The wealth of Arab-Christian communities in the 11th century Marwanid amirate of Mayyafariqin and Diyarbakr was reflected in the decoration of some churches. This wall mosaic in the Monastery of Mar Gabriel, near Mardin, is a survival from the early medieval period. (Author's photograph)



Lake Urmia in north-western Iran lay in a broad, fertile region, then called Azarbayjan, where armies traditionally mustered before a campaign. (Author's photograph)

On the Islamic side a system of frontier provinces known as *thughur* had developed, characterized by a strongly militarized, *jihad*-orientated Muslim population. When Caliphal authority fragmented, small but strong and sometimes quite prosperous local Muslim amirates had emerged, some of Arab origin, some of mixed Arab-Armenian heritage, others Kurdish. In most places, however, Muslims were outnumbered by local Christian communities though the latter, mostly being adherents of non-Orthodox, non-Greek churches, tended to support their Muslim overlords or at least to remain neutral in Muslim struggles against the Byzantine Empire.

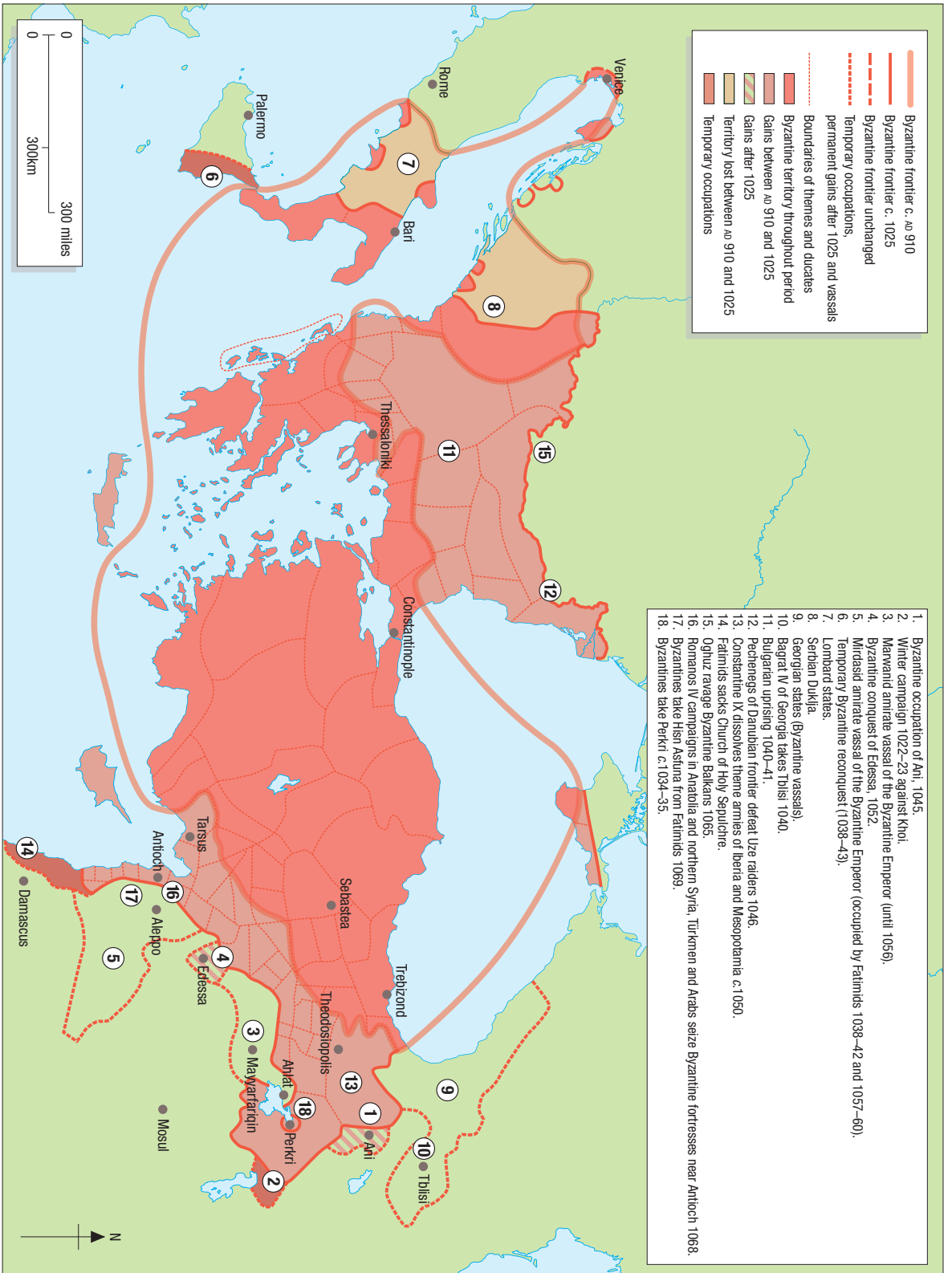
Meanwhile the Muslim world was wracked by a schism between the Sunni and Shi'a strands of Islam, largely resulting from differing views of authority within the Islamic community. It was reflected in local power struggles between neighbouring *amirs* as well as a wider confrontation between the Sunni 'Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and the Shi'a Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo. During the first half of the 11th century it also looked as if the Shi'a would triumph – but then the Saljuq Turks appeared on the scene and changed everything.

THE REVIVAL OF BYZANTINE POWER

By the 11th century Byzantine views of Islam had changed. Muslims ceased to be just another form of heretic, instead becoming God's instrument to punish Christians who were not behaving or believing correctly. Meanwhile, similarities between local Christian and Muslim military elites were remarkable in the eastern frontier regions. Two Armenian kingdoms had also been established under 'Abbasid suzerainty, Bagratids to the north and Artsruni to the south, while the main Arab–Armenian amirates lay north of Lake Van.

Almost all became targets of Byzantine expansion in the 10th century. Eventually only the Marwanid amirate clung to a few outposts north of Lake Van while the Shaddadids survived as a precarious outpost of Islamic rule south of the Caucasus. Unable to profit from the fall of their Muslim rivals, most of the small Christian Armenian states had similarly fallen victim to Byzantine annexation. Only the tiny kingdoms of Tasir-Joraget, Siwnik' and some even smaller principalities, remained more or less independent.

The Byzantine defensive structure



Such expansionism was seen by the Byzantines as necessary self-defence or the regaining of lands lost to Islam centuries earlier. Furthermore, the region around Lake Van was of key strategic importance. During the 11th century the most important fortified towns on the northern side of the lake were Ahlat, Altzike, Archech and Perkri with Manzikert dominating their hinterland. Rising on the eastern shore of the lake was the citadel of Van while the rugged southern shore was backed by almost inaccessible mountains inhabited by Kurdish tribes who resisted outside interference. To the south-east stood the citadel of Bitlis beyond which was the fertile Tigris Valley, heartland of the still powerful Marwanid amirate.

Annexation of this region therefore seemed to offer Byzantium a significant strategic gain. However, Armenian loyalty to the Byzantine Empire remained at best fragile. To the west the descendants of Armenians forcibly relocated generations earlier had been substantially 'Byzantinized' though remaining members of a different church. Elsewhere the majority of Armenians remained unassimilated, unsupportive and occasionally hostile to the Empire. Indeed, Byzantine chronicles frequently complained that Armenians were unreliable, proud, secretive and separate while Armenian chronicles complained about 'perverse, duplicitous and effeminate Greeks'. The situation was further complicated by the inability of the Armenians and Georgians to form firm alliances against their common rivals – be they Byzantine or Muslim.

Then there were the Kurds. Always present but only occasionally appearing in a leading role, the fragmented Kurdish tribes of the 11th century were not, however, the tribes of the pre-Islamic era. There had been great changes with a restructuring of Kurdish society, conversion to Islam and considerable intermarriage with the conquering Arabs. Nevertheless, several Kurdish tribal leaders had taken over from declining Arab amirates by the early 11th century, the existing Arab civil and military elites transferring their allegiance to these new rulers at a time when Islam was on the defensive against a resurgent Byzantium.

The Byzantine government was aware of the security problems caused by tension between differing Christian churches. Hence they tried – with notable lack of success – to win over the Monophysite Armenians and Syriacs. This in turn often made Armenians and Syriacs complain of 'Greek' bullying. Meanwhile, the military importance of the area meant that many elite mercenary units were stationed there, including many Normans from southern Italy.

By and large the Muslims of these conquered regions could remain only if they converted to Christianity. More often substantial communities were expelled as refugees, eager for revenge. The inhabitants of several lost frontier towns claimed descent from *ghazis*, the religiously motivated frontier warriors of the early years of Islamic rule. Sometimes migrating only a short distance to a nearby Muslim frontier town, they remained a militarized and *jihad*-orientated presence in this volatile region.

For Byzantium, over-extended ambition soon resulted in significant defeats, notably in Syria and Egypt. The Empire now ruled over a large non-Orthodox Christian population and 11th-century emperors faced mounting problems, especially in the Balkans. Yet in the east the Byzantines still faced no significant rivals. In fact historians have traditionally regarded the period from the great Byzantine victories of the 10th century until the disaster of Manzikert as one of military negligence and unjustified overconfidence.

There does indeed seem to have been complacency in the Empire's emphasis on administrative reforms rather than strong defence. Constantine IX is particularly blamed for actions such as his dissolution of *theme* or regional armies facing friendly Georgia and the fragmented Muslim amirates of south-eastern Anatolia.

Similarly the Byzantine annexation of most of Armenia has been criticized as removing a defensive belt, which had worked quite well, and replacing it with something that failed. On the other hand, for several years these measures seemed effective. Around Lake Van, the frontier between Byzantine and Muslim territory remained stable; the Persian chronicler Nasir-i Khusraw, who visited this region in 1046, regarded Marwanid-ruled Ahlat as the frontier between Muslims and Armenians, noting that Arabic, Persian and Armenian were all spoken there. Beyond that frontier the Byzantine garrisons remained scattered and somewhat isolated, though their vulnerability had yet to be demonstrated.

THE RISE OF THE SALJUQS

Amongst many misconceptions about the Turkish cultures of Central and Inner Asia is the idea that the Turks roamed a 'sea of grass' where they fought their endless internecine wars, constructed ephemeral states and occasionally attacked or overran their more civilized neighbours. In reality the steppe grasslands that maintained the Turks' nomadic lifestyle were often surrounded by agricultural river valleys, metal-rich mountains, dense forest to the north and deserts to the south. Furthermore, nomad invasions of their settled neighbours were usually a result of actions by settled states, which had disrupted the affairs of steppe societies.

Nor were tribal loyalties within steppe societies as straightforward as is often assumed. Tribal families tended to support those who were seen as favouring their economic interests, and when common interests failed, fragmentation resulted, as would be seen throughout Saljuq history. Nor were all the Turkish-speakers of these regions nomads, for they also included town or village dwellers, and settled agriculturalists. This was particularly true of Semirechye, on the southern side of Lake Balkhash, which featured prominently in the first decades of Saljuq history.

A Byzantine carved ivory panel showing Joshua accepting the submission of Gibeon, probably made in the 11th century. (Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. A.542–1910, London. Author's photograph)





Much of the Great Mosque in Isfahan dates from the 11th- and 12th-century Saljuq era. (Author's photograph)

The indigenous religious beliefs of the Turks are said to have centred upon a single god, represented as the Blue Sky, plus a strong belief in magic and a veneration of ancestors associated with totemic animals, above all, the grey wolf. The first external belief system to have had a widespread impact is believed to have been Buddhism while Manicheism entered the arena between the mid-8th and early 10th centuries. During the early medieval period there was almost a 'conversion race' between Nestorian

Christians and Manicheians seeking to convert the peoples of Inner Asia. However, it was the spread of Islam that underpinned the rise of the Saljuqs; much of the Islamic missionary work amongst nomadic Turkish tribes being undertaken by *sufi* dervishes who were often unorthodox in their beliefs and practices.

A part of the Oghuz people, known as the Toquz-Oghuz, was ruled by a Manichean elite, which nevertheless included many Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. Around AD 940 'heathen Turks', who were probably early Qarakhanids, seized Balasaghun, the main town of Semirechye. The ruling elite of the Qarakhanids then became Muslim in the mid-10th century, resulting in the first Turkish Islamic state in history, and it was from the fringes of this Qarakhanid state that the Saljuqs emerged.

The origins of the Saljuqs are nevertheless shrouded in legend. They claimed descent from Saljuq Ibn Duqaq who came to Jend (now Qyzyl-Orda), one of the main Oghuz towns, and converted to Islam before the local Yabghu or Oghuz ruler did so. By taking control of Jend, Saljuq enabled the Muslim population to stop paying tribute to the still pagan Yabghu. This, it was said, began the hostility between most Oghuz and Saljuqs.

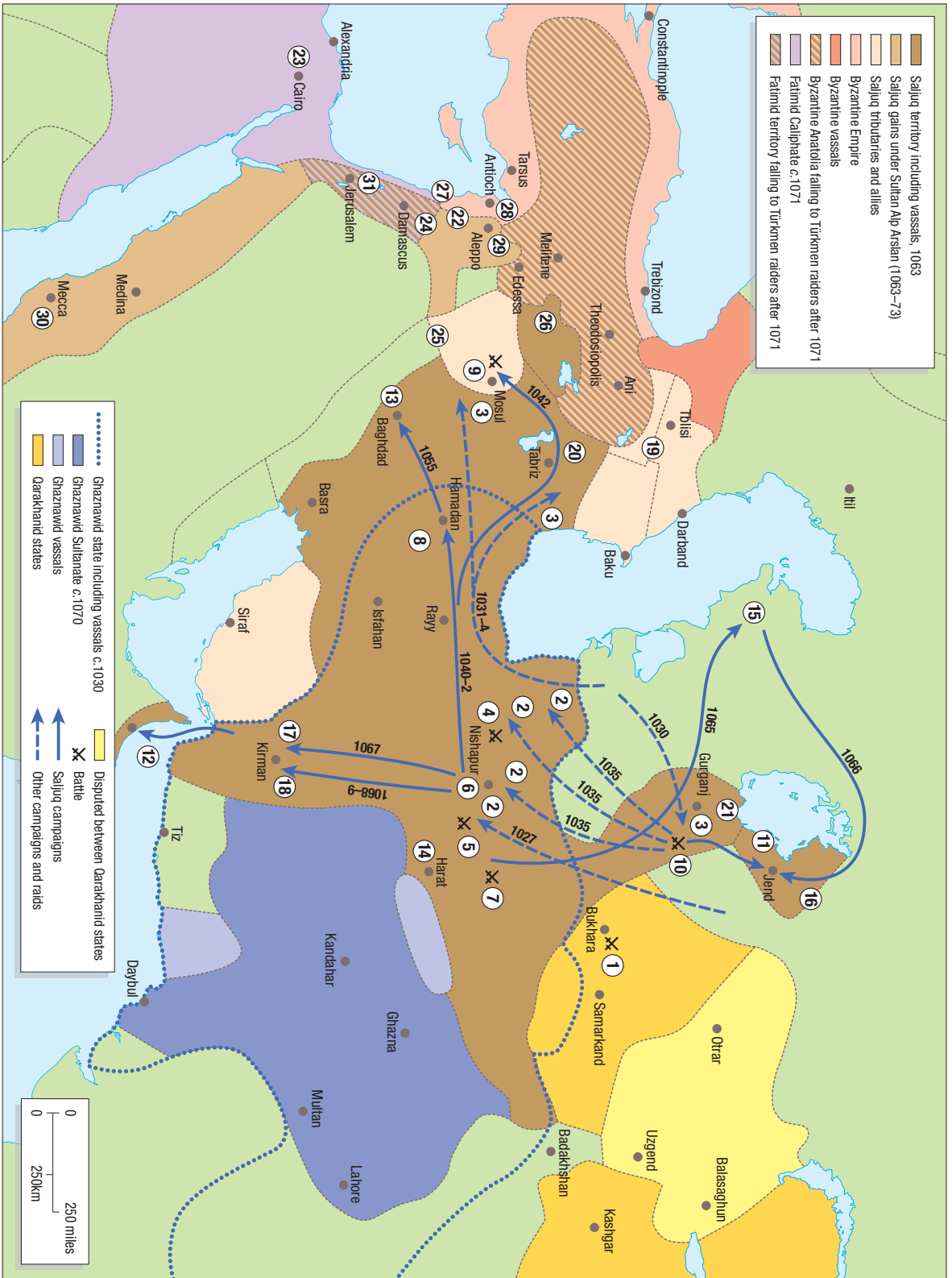
Saljuq campaigns and battles

- 1 Ghaznawids defeat Saljuqs near Bukhara 1025.
- 2 Türkmen migrations into Khurasan 1027–35.
- 3 Türkmen raids into Iran, Azarbaijan and Khwarazm 1031–34.
- 4 Saljuqs defeat Ghaznawids near Nisa 1035.
- 5 Battle between Ghaznawids and Saljuqs at Serakhs 1038.
- 6 1040 Nishapur seized by Tughril Beg 1040.
- 7 1040 Saljuqs defeat Ghaznawids at Dandanaqan 1040.
- 8 Saljuq advance from Nishapur to Hamadan 1040–42.
- 9 Saljuq invasion of northern Iraq 1042; Arab tribes defeat Turks at Tal Afar.
- 10 Saljuqs defeat Shah Malik Barani at Kath 1043.
- 11 Saljuqs expell the Oghuz Yabghu from Khwarazm and Jend 1043–44.
- 12 Saljuqs of Kirman take control of Omani coast c.1054.
- 13 Tughril Beg occupies Baghdad 1055.
- 14 Defeat of rebellion by Musa Yabgu, Saljuq governor of Harat 1064.
- 15 Alp Arslan campaigns against Kipchaks and Türkmen 1065.
- 16 Alp Arslan attacks Türkmen 1066.
- 17 Alp Arslan defeats rebellion by his brother Kawurd 1067.
- 18 Defeat of further rebellion by Kawurd and Fazluya 1068–69.

Other events

- 19 Georgian Christians and Muslim *amir* of Tblisi join forces against Shaddadids 1030.
- 20 Oghuz Turks plunder Maragheh and massacre Kurds 1037; Oghuz flee south of Lake Van 1040/41.
- 21 Shah Malik Ibn 'Ali of the Oghuz Yabghu seizes Khwarazm from Ghaznawids 1041.
- 22 Fatimids execute many local militia in Aleppo 1060.
- 23 Prolonged famine in Egypt 1062–67; struggle for power between the Fatimid Caliph and army commander Nasir al-Dawla Ibn Hamdan until early 1074.
- 24 Badr al-Jamali, Fatimid governor in Syria, attempts pro-Fatimid change of ruler in Aleppo 1064.
- 25 'Uqaylids take Rahba 1064.
- 26 Saljuqs unsuccessfully intervene in Marwanid *amirate* 1065/66.
- 27 Fatimids install garrison at Hisn Afuna 1066/67.
- 28 Türkmen and Arabs seize Byzantine fortresses near Antioch 1068.
- 29 Rioting between Turks and Arabs in Aleppo 1070.
- 30 Sharif of Mecca transfers recognition from Fatimid to 'Abbasid Caliph and accepts Saljuq protection 1070.
- 31 Conquest of Syrian and Palestinian interior from Fatimids by Türkmen under Atsiz Ibn Uvaq 1071–76.

The rise of the Saljuqs





A gold coin from the reign of Romanos IV, the Emperor being at Christ's right hand, Empress Eudocia being at Christ's left hand. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Medailles, Paris)

Other accounts maintain that the Saljuq family and its followers were allowed to live on the frontier of the huge Samanid amirate, in the mid-regions of the Syr Darya River, during the later 10th century. This was on condition they defend it against their pagan Oghuz cousins. What is clear is that, under the loose leadership of the Saljuq family, substantial numbers of Turkish tribal groups crossed the Syr Darya early in the 11th century, then spread into Transoxania, eastern Iran and Afghanistan. Most were those Oghuz (Arabic 'Ghuzz') who converted to Islam while retaining their original tribal framework and nomadic pastoral lifestyle and were known as Türkmén. Their loyalty to the Saljuqs depended entirely upon the latter's military success. The Saljuqs thus headed a substantial tribal migration, which for a while dominated the eastern Islamic world and Middle East. The number of people involved remains unknown but it has been suggested that 16,000 Türkmén warriors fought for the Saljuqs at the early battle of Dandanaqan in 1040.

While the early Saljuqs pressed south and west, other Oghuz migrated westwards, north of the Black Sea until they reached the Byzantine frontier in the Balkans. The Saljuqs' original rivals, the now Muslim Oghuz principality of Jend, lasted about half a century. Then, three years after their victory at Dandanaqan, the Saljuqs returned to expel the Yabghu Shah Malik from Khwarazm and Jend. As the Islamic historian Clifford Bosworth wrote: 'The division of authority and the strong rivalry of the two families within the Oghuz thus ended with the triumph of Saljuq Ibn Duqaq's two grandsons Toghril [Tughril] Beg and Chaghri [Çağrı] Beg and the inauguration of the Great Saljuq empire.'¹

The Saljuqs' first conquests were achieved by traditional nomadic methods of threatening to destroy trade and agriculture. They also decisively defeated their Ghaznawid rivals on the battlefield. The Saljuq family's newfound authority was then legitimized by the Sunni 'Abbasid Caliph who already saw them as a potent ally against his Shi'a rivals. In western Iran and Iraq the Saljuq's main adversaries were indeed the Shi'a but fractured Buwayhid dynasty. But as the Saljuqs' opponents changed, and as their own realm expanded, the victor modified their traditional military and political systems. Their success in doing so influenced the history of the Middle East and beyond for centuries.

In fact the Saljuq Sultans adopted Iranian or Islamic forms of both government and military organization. Herein, perhaps, lay the roots of the Byzantine failure to realize that, in facing a full-scale Saljuq army, they were not fighting a tribal horde of Turkish nomads but one which combined the strengths of both early Islamic and Central Asian Turkish military traditions. Meanwhile, the interests of predatory Türkmén and Saljuq Sultans were diverging. In order to avoid conflict, large numbers of Türkmén moved to Azarbayjan, which already had a Turkish minority. It also possessed a relatively cool climate and ample pasture to maintain the Türkmén's flocks. In addition it was far enough from the centres of Saljuq authority to allow a large measure of autonomy and it lay on the frontier of Islam, facing lands that offered great opportunities to raid – in the name of Islam.

¹ Bosworth, C. E., 'The Origins of the Seljuqs', in C. Lange and S. Mécit (eds.), *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture* (Edinburgh 2011) 18.

ROMANOS DIOGENES FIGHTS BACK

With the death of Emperor Constantine Dukas in 1067 his widow, the Empress Eudocia Makrembolitissa, chose Romanos Diogenes to be her husband in the hope that he would invigorate Byzantine efforts to defeat the increasingly troublesome Türkmen raids. To do this the new Emperor not only had to convince the ‘civilian’ or ‘bureaucratic’ faction at court, whose suspicion of the military ran deep, but also the previous Emperor’s brother, the Caesar John Dukas. In fact John Dukas would oppose Romanos Diogenes throughout his reign, but, rather than focus upon this latent opposition, the new Emperor did what was expected of him and turned to deal with Byzantium’s eastern frontier.

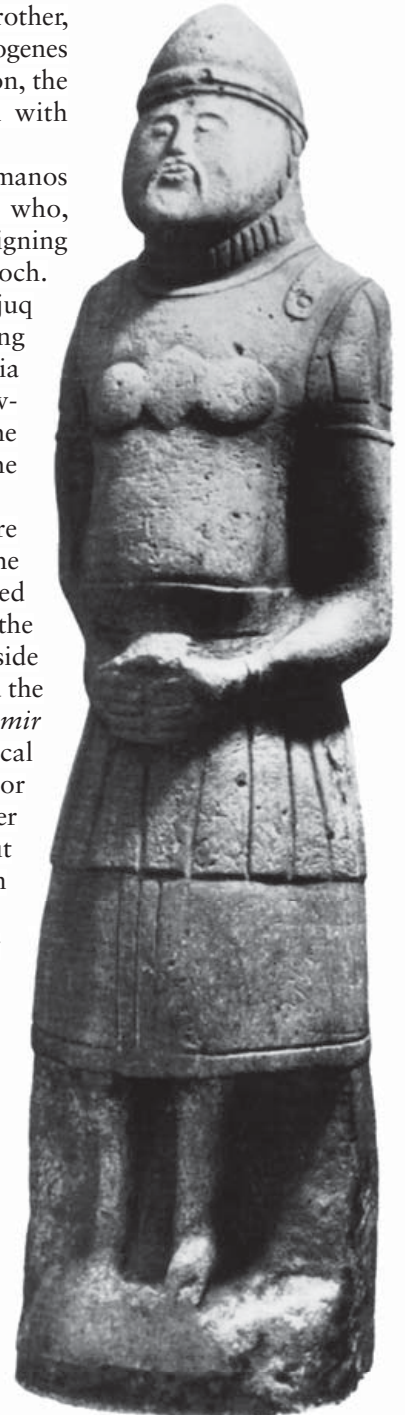
The most significant campaign of 1068 started when Emperor Romanos was still preparing his army. In April Afşin, a senior Saljuq leader who, fearing the Sultan’s wrath for killing a colleague, had been campaigning independently inside Byzantine territory since 1066, besieged Antioch. On receiving Alp Arslan’s pardon, Afşin joined forces with another Saljuq commander, Ahmad-Shah, to raid deep into Anatolia, plundering Amorium. Meanwhile Alp Arslan himself had led his army into Georgia along with his *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk and his senior commander, Sav-Tekin. Before much could be achieved, however, news of the death of the Qarakhanid ruler and of another rebellion in southern Iran obliged the Sultan to turn back.

In March 1068 Romanos IV led his army towards Syria but before reaching Caesarea (Kayseri) he learned that raiders were operating to the north-east. Leaving most of the army at Sebastea, Romanos advanced upon the Türkmen with his best troops. The raiders fled, whereupon the Emperor marched south again. Byzantine forces ravaged the countryside around Aleppo until they were bought off, whereupon Romanos seized the strategic fortress of Manbij (Hieropolis to the Byzantines). The *amir* Mahmud of Aleppo harried the Byzantine reserves with the help of local Türkmen, defeating a Byzantine force sent to rescue them. Emperor Romanos fell back to besiege Aleppo but, short of supplies and in danger of encirclement, the Byzantine army retreated northwards, trying but failing to intercept Turkish forces under Afşin as they returned from sacking Amorium.

Following this somewhat limited success, Romanos IV prepared for new operations. Meanwhile a Norman mercenary from southern Italy, Robert Crispin, who had been sent to combat Türkmen raiders operating in north-eastern Anatolia, turned upon local Byzantine tax collectors because they refused to provide what Crispin considered necessary to feed his troops. Around the same time Romanos IV set off on another Eastern campaign which achieved no more than the first, being characterized by complex strategic manoeuvring by both Byzantines and Turks.

Perhaps pondering that much more would be needed to defeat this rash of Türkmen raiding, Romanos IV made his way back to the Byzantine capital late in 1069. Even the news that Byzantine forces in Antioch briefly took Hisn Asfuna in central Syria from a local Fatimid garrison is unlikely to have raised spirits at a time when friendly relations with the Fatimid Caliphate would have been a

Carved stone statue from the Ukrainian steppes, probably dating from the 11th or 12th century and apparently showing a Turkish chieftain in Byzantine military costume. (State Historical Museum, Moscow)





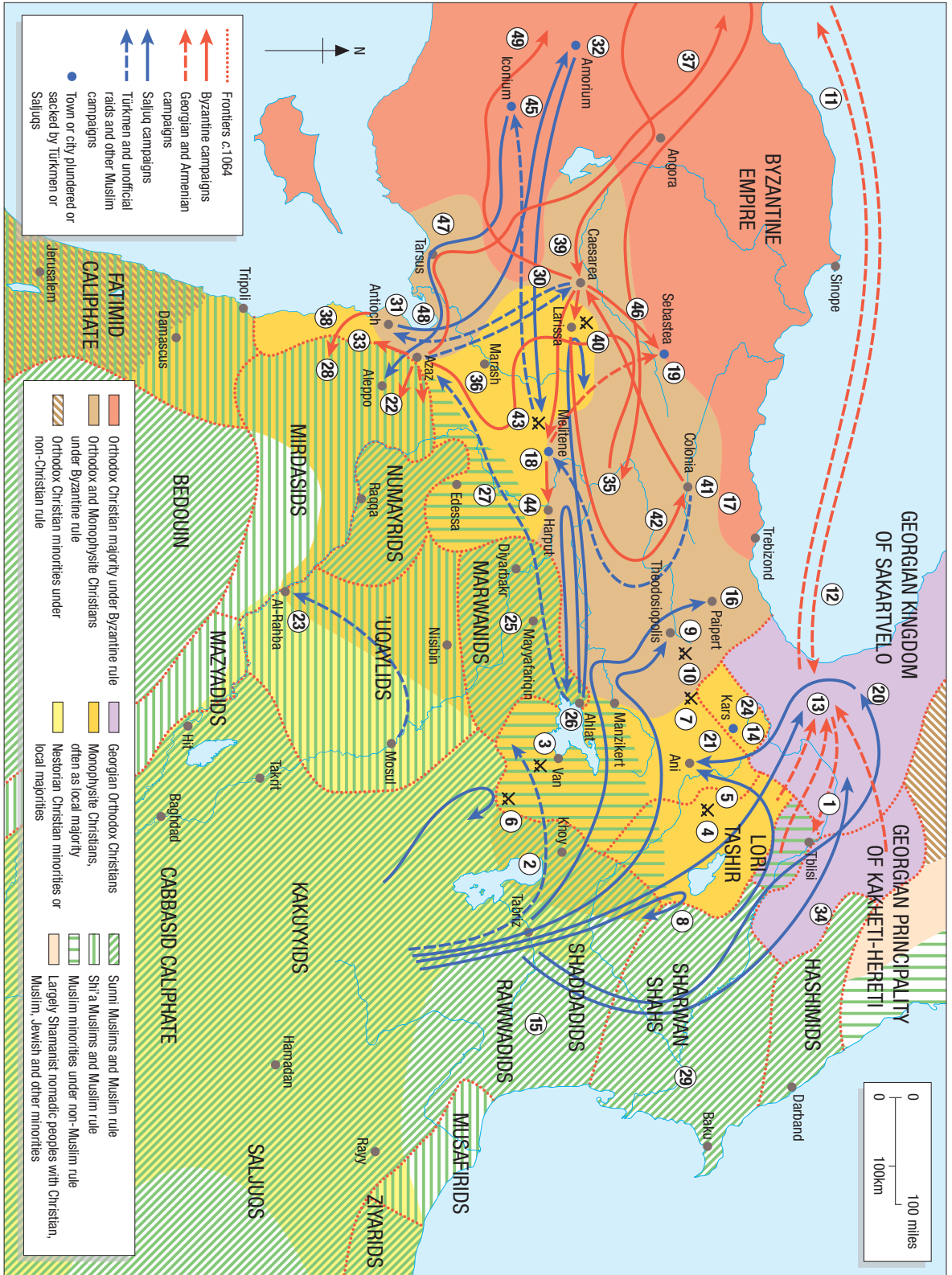
Looking across the Bosphorus towards Istanbul, once the Byzantine Imperial capital of Constantinople. (Fred Nicolle photograph)

strategic benefit. Emperor Romanos did not himself take the field in 1070, instead delegating the defence of Anatolia to Manuel Comnenus while he focused on political problems at court. Manuel established his headquarters at Caesarea in Cappadocia but moved to Sebastea because Türkmen raiders were so active in the Pontic Mountains. Another Türkmen force, largely of the Yavuki tribe and commanded by Erigsen Ibn Yunus Yabgu Ibn Saljuq who had married Alp Arslan's sister Gevher Hatun, then crossed the mountains from north-western Syria to raid Cappadocia.

Caught between these two enemies, Manuel Comnenus was ordered by Emperor Romanos to attack those from the Aleppo region. He did so but was defeated and captured by Erigsen Ibn Yunus. Accepting the reality of the situation, some local Armenian leaders make peace with Erigsen, thus enabling him to lead his small army westward, though in so doing these Armenians earned the hatred of local Greeks. Apparently against Alp Arslan's orders, Erigsen reached Chonae where his troops sacked the important Byzantine Church of St Michael the Archangel.

- 1 Bagrat IV of Georgia conquers *amirate* of Tblisi, 1040.
- 2 Oghuz Türkmen flee south of Lake Van 1040–41.
- 3 Türkmen raiders defeat Armenians in Vaspourakan, 1042.
- 4 Gagik II and Grigor Pahlavuni defeat Türkmen raiders at Bjni, 1042/43.
- 5 Turks attack Ani, 1045.
- 6 Hasan Ibn Musa Yabgu defeated by Byzantines at river Zab, 1046.
- 7 Saljuqs under Ibrahim Yinal attack Vagharshaven 1047.
- 8 Saljuqs under Ibrahim Yinal head towards Ganja but retreat in face of counter-move by Bagrat IV's Byzantine allies, 1048.
- 9 Sultan Tughril Beg sends Ibrahim Yinal and Kütalmiş against Byzantine forces, sacking Arzen 1048.
- 10 Saljuqs defeat combined Byzantine-Georgian army at Kapetron, September 1048.
- 11 Georgian civil war between Bagrat IV and Liparit IV obliges Bagrat to flee to Constantinople, 1050.
- 12 Bagrat IV returns to Georgia, 1053.
- 13 Saljuqs, Armenian rulers, Georgian Prince of Kakhetia and exiled *amir* of Tblisi, attack Bagrat IV, 1053.
- 14 Saljuqs sack Kars, 1053.
- 15 Tughril Beg imposes Saljuq suzerainty on the Rawwadids and Shaddadids, 1054.
- 16 Tughril unsuccessfully besieges Manzikert, threatens Theodosiopolis and attacks Paipert, 1054.
- 17 Türkmen raid Colonia, 1057.
- 18 Türkmen raid Murat river area, 1057–58; sack Melitene, 1058.
- 19 Türkmen sack Sebastea, 1059, remaining in eastern Anatolia until 1060.
- 20 Alp Arslan ravages Georgia in 1060 and subsequent years.
- 21 Alp Arslan captures Ani, 1064.
- 22 Fatimid governor in Damascus tries to engineer pro-Fatimid coup in Aleppo, 1064.
- 23 'Uqaylids take Rahba, 1064.
- 24 Türkmen attack Kars, 1065.
- 25 Saljuqs intervene in Marwanid *amirate*, 1065/66.
- 26 Alp Arslan sends Gümüş-Tekin and Bekçioğlu Afşin with Türkmen raiders, 1066, taking fortresses between the Murat Su and Tigris rivers; on returning to Ahlat, Afşin kills Gümüş-Tekin.
- 27 Fleeing Alp Arslan's wrath, Afşin heads towards Antioch.
- 28 Fatimids install garrison at Hisn Asfuna.
- 29 Alp Arslan imposes Saljuq suzerainty over the Shirwan Shahs, 1067.
- 30 Afşin attacks Caesarea, 1067.
- 31 Afşin besieges Antioch, 1067.
- 32 Receiving Alp Arslan's pardon, Afşin accepts tribute from Antioch; with Ahmad-Shah he raids deep into Anatolia, plundering Amorium, 1068.
- 33 Türkmen and Arabs seize Byzantine fortresses near Antioch, 1068.
- 34 Alp Arslan campaigns in Georgia, 1068.
- 35 Romanos IV campaigns in Anatolia, 1068.
- 36 Romanos IV raids northern Syria, 1068.
- 37 Romanos IV returns to Constantinople, January 1069.
- 38 Local Byzantine forces take Hisn Asfuna, 1069.
- 39 Romanos IV starts campaign in spring 1069, divided army, sends Manuel Comnenus to strengthen Sebastea, Philaretus to strengthen Melitene, and himself intends to retake fortresses between Euphrates and Tigris.
- 40 Romanos IV defeats Saljuq garrison from Ahlat near Larissa.
- 41 Crispin rebels in Colonia and defeats Imperial force.
- 42 Romanos IV heads north to Colonia, Crispin submits and is pardoned, summer 1069.
- 43 Afşin defeats Philaretus outside Melitene, summer 1069.
- 44 Philaretus flees to Harput.
- 45 Afşin sacks Iconium.
- 46 Romanos IV attempts to cut Afşin's escape
- 47 Afşin crosses mountains and escapes to Aleppo.
- 48 Byzantine *dux* of Antioch fails to cut Afşin's escape.

The approaching cataclysm





The Ahlat Gate in the massive fortifications of Diyarbakir, which were regarded as the strongest in the medieval Middle East. (Author's photograph)

So Alp Arslan sent another force under Afşin to demand Erigsen's return. The latter, who had already been pardoned by the Sultan for taking part in a rebellion in Kirman a year earlier, was instead persuaded by his captive, Manuel Comnenus, to enter Imperial service. Arriving outside Constantinople with Manuel Comnenus and other senior Byzantine prisoners, the Turkish turncoat was given the rank of *proedrus*. Afşin also approached Constantinople but when Emperor Romanos refused to hand over Erigsen he withdrew, getting trapped by winter snows in the Taurus Mountains. Not until spring 1071 did Afşin make it back to Azarbaijan. Despite his best efforts, Emperor Romanos had made almost no headway against Türkmen raiders, while Alp Arslan was still focused upon Saljuq ambitions within the Islamic Middle East with no apparent intention of taking on the mighty Byzantine Empire.

CHRONOLOGY

1016–27	Byzantine ban on trade with Fatimids.	1048–49	Saljuqs under Ibrahim Yinal move against Ganja in Georgia but are forced back by Byzantine countermove; Türkmén attack Mananaghi district of western Armenia, defeat Byzantines and capture Georgian Prince Liparit.
1022–23	Winter campaign by Byzantine Emperor Basil II against Khoy (north-western Iran).		
1028	Türkmén enter Azarbayjan.	c.1050	Emperor Constantine IX dissolves some eastern provincial armies.
1030	Georgia and <i>amir</i> of Tbilisi clash with Shaddadids.	1053	Türkmén sack Kars; Armenians defeat raiders in Surmani area.
1037	Oghuz plunder Maragheh, massacre Kurds.	1054	Rawwadids and Shaddadids of Azarbayjan and Arran accept Saljuq suzerainty; Saljuq Sultan Tughril Beg unsuccessfully besieges Manzikert; Türkmén attack Baiburt; Byzantine humiliation of Fatimid envoy in Constantinople results in Fatimids sacking Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.
1040	Bagrat IV of Georgia takes Tbilisi; death of King John-Smbat III of Ani; Saljuqs defeat Ghaznawids at Dandanaqan.	1055	Byzantines abandon alliance with Fatimid Caliphate and agree that Saljuq Sultan's name is mentioned in congregational prayers in Constantinople mosque.
1040–01	Oghuz flee from Azarbayjan to south of Lake Van.	1056–57	Norman mercenary Hervé Phrangopoulos temporarily deserts to Türkmén.
1042	Armenian leaders resist Türkmén raids with mixed success.	1057	Türkmén attack Melitene and Colonia.
1043–04	Saljuqs expel the Oghuz Yabghu from Khwarazm.	1058	Türkmén sack Melitene.
1045	Abdication of Gagik II of Ani; Türkmén attack Ani.	1059	Türkmén sack Sebastea.
1046	Hasan Ibn Musa Yabgu, oldest member of the Saljuq family, defeated by Byzantines at Zab River; Pechenegs of Byzantine frontier zone on Danube, defeat Uzes.		
1047	Türkmén attack Vagharshaven.		

1060	Alp Arslan ravages wide area of Georgia; Fatimids execute many local militia in Aleppo.		protection; Alp Arslan invades Byzantine Armenia, taking Archech and Manzikert; Alp Arslan sends Nizam al-Din to Mayyafariqin in attempt to heal quarrel between Marwanid leaders Nasir Ibn Ahmad and Sa'id Ibn Ahmad; Alp Arslan leads army via Mayyafariqin and Diyarbakr to Edessa which he besieges.
1062–67	Prolonged famine in Egypt.		
1064	Alp Arslan captures Ani; Badr al-Jamali, Fatimid governor in Syria, tries to engineer pro-Fatimid coup in Aleppo; defeat of rebellion by senior Saljuq, Musa Yabgu of Harat; 'Uqaylid ruler of Mosul takes Rahba on the Euphrates.	1071	Alp Arslan abandons siege of Edessa and marches against Aleppo, arriving January or February; rival embassies from the Fatimid Caliph and the Fatimid <i>wazir</i> Nasir al-Dawla seek a Byzantine alliance; Romanos IV prepares a major campaign during the winter, mustering troops in late February and March; Byzantine army marches to the Sangarius River where it is reorganized, April and May; Byzantine army marches via Sebastea to Theodosiopolis, arriving late June; Alp Arslan learns that Emperor Romanos is marching east so abandons siege of Aleppo, 26 April; Alp Arslan dismisses most of his army (probably at Diyarbakr) then leads <i>askar</i> of 4,000 <i>mamluks</i> across mountains to Khoy, recruiting Kurdish troops on the way; Nizam al-Mulk musters a new Saljuq army; Alp Arslan advances towards Lake Van early in August; Emperor Romanos sends a substantial force to take control of the Ahlat area while himself heading for Manzikert which falls on 23 August; on same day the Byzantine army outside Ahlat is defeated and flees to Muş; Alp Arslan makes camp at the northern edge of the Süphan Dağ; Emperor Romanos is defeated and captured at battle of Manzikert, 26 August; Alp Arslan releases Romanos after eight days then returns to Azarbayjan; reappearance of Emperor Romanos triggers civil war in Byzantine Empire.
1065	Alp Arslan campaigns against Kipchaks and Türkmen in Central Asia; Türkmen attack Kars; Saljuqs unsuccessfully intervene in amirate of Mayyafariqin; Oghuz ravage Byzantine Balkans.		
1066	Gümüş-Tekin and Bekçioğlu Afşin sieze Byzantine fortresses between Murat and Tigris rivers; Afşin kills Gümüş-Tekin and flees into Anatolia.		
1066–67	Fatimids install garrison at Hisn Asfuna.		
1067	Alp Arslan defeats rebellion by his brother Kawurd in Kirman, also imposes suzerainty over Shirwan-Shah of Shirwan; Türkmen under Afşin attack Caesarea.		
1068	Alp Arslan campaigns in Georgia; Emperor Romanos campaigns in Anatolia and northern Syria; Türkmen and Arabs seize Byzantine fortresses near Antioch.		
1068–89	Defeat of further rebellion by Kawurd and Fazluya in Kirman.		
1069	Romanos campaigns in Anatolia; Byzantines take Hisn Asfuna from Fatimids; Manuel Comnenus is captured by Türkmen.		
1070	Manuel Comnenus returns to Constantinople with his erstwhile captor; Saljuq force under Afşin reaches Sea of Marmara; Sharif of Mecca transfers recognition from Fatimid to 'Abbasid Caliph and accepts Saljuq	1072	Romanos is defeated, is blinded on 29 June and dies soon after; Alp Arslan campaigns against rebels in Transoxania but is assassinated, dying on 24 November and is succeeded by his son Malik Shah.

OPPOSING COMMANDERS

BYZANTINE COMMANDERS

Romanos Diogenes came from an important Byzantine aristocratic family whose powerbase was in Cappadocia, in central Anatolia. After earning a good military reputation against Pechenegs and others in the Balkans, his career almost came to an end when he was convicted of plotting against the widowed Empress Eudocia in 1067. She, however, recognized that Romanos had both talent and drive, so not only pardoned him but also selected him as her husband and co-ruler during the minority of her young son, the future Emperor Michael VII Dukas. Enthroned as Emperor Romanos IV, his task was to deal with various threats to the Empire's frontiers. Nevertheless he continued to face significant political opposition and was overthrown while briefly held captive by the Saljuq Sultan after the battle of Manzikert. Romanos IV tried to regain the throne but was defeated and died as a result of being blinded by the victors.

Nikephoros Bryennios (known as The Elder to distinguish him from the chronicler Nikephoros Bryennios The Younger) came from a minor Byzantine aristocratic family, the son of a general also named Nikephoros Bryennios. Nikephoros Bryennios The Elder became a field commander and was widely considered one of the best tacticians in the Byzantine army. As one of the few Byzantine commanders emerging from the Manzikert campaign with any credit, he was made *dux* of Bulgaria. Deciding that the new Emperor Michael VII was incapable of reversing a continuing Byzantine collapse, Nikephoros Bryennios attempted to seize the Imperial throne. When this Bryennios was defeated, he was blinded but, unlike Emperor Romanos IV, he survived the punishment and became an adviser to Emperor Alexios Komnenos.

An engraved bronze dish showing an enthroned ruler, dating from the 11th century and probably made for the Ghaznawid or early Saljuq court. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1971.42, New York. Author's photograph)



The mountains south-east of Lake Van through which Alp Arslan led his *askar* of 4,000 men in the winter of 1070–71. (Author's photograph)



Andronikos Dukas was described as brave and well versed in military strategy but ‘ill-disposed’ towards the Emperor Romanos IV. As a member of the powerful Dukas family, which supplied the Byzantine Empire with several Emperors, Andronikos was a first cousin of Emperor Michael VII who took the Imperial throne in the aftermath of Manzikert. As much a politician as a military commander, he was at the heart of the intrigues that swirled around the Imperial throne. Defeated by the rebel Norman mercenary, Roussel de Bailleul, Andronikos Dukas was released so that his wounds could be properly treated, eventually dying in 1077.

Theodore Alyates was a senior Cappadocian soldier, though almost nothing seems to be known about his career before the Manzikert campaign. After escaping from that disaster with his Cappadocian units largely intact, Theodore Alyates remained loyal to Emperor Romanos IV during the latter’s attempt to regain the throne. However, Theodore Alyates was himself defeated, imprisoned and blinded at Dokeia.

Nikephoros Basilakes was a senior Byzantine soldier of Armenian origin who was *dux* of Theodosiupolis on the eve of the Manzikert campaign. Renowned for courage, but also impetuosity, he was captured at the start of that battle. Subsequently released by the Sultan, Nikephoros Basilakes eventually replaced Nikephoros Bryennios as *dux* of Dyrrhachium in Albania. Like many other senior Byzantine commanders during this troubled period, he rebelled, was defeated and blinded.

Roussel de Bailleul was one of the most successful Norman mercenaries who sought their fortunes in the Byzantine Empire. After earning a reputation as a good commander under Robert Guiscard in southern Italy and Sicily, he proved his worth in the Balkans, being sent to Anatolia where he was given command of the corps of elite Norman mercenaries. In the chaotic aftermath of Manzikert, Roussel de Bailleul successfully defended Kastamoni [Kastamonou] but his tendency to act independently of both Byzantines and Turks was seen as a threat. Proclaimed a rebel by Emperor Michael VII he was captured by Alexios Comnenos (the future Emperor Alexios) but released on the orders of Michael VII. Sent against the rebel Nikephoros Bryennios in the Balkans, Roussel died soon after.



SALJUQ COMMANDERS

Muhammad Ibn Da'ud Çağrı 'Adud al-Dawla Abu Shuja' Alp Arslan took over the Khurasan and Khwarazm when his father, Çağrı Beg died around 1058. When Sultan Tughril died in 1063, both Muhammad Ibn Da'ud and his uncle, Kütałmış, refused to accept the throne going to Muhammad Ibn Da'ud's brother Sulayman. After defeating Kütałmış and several other rivals, Muhammad Ibn Da'ud took control. Generally referred to as Alp Arslan or 'Heroic Lion' and being a courageous, skilful commander, Alp Arslan was not an orthodox pious Muslim, but drank wine like so many of the Turkish elite at that time. Nevertheless, Alp Arslan's success as a ruler, his conquests and his unexpected defeat of the Byzantine Emperor at Manzikert in 1071, meant that he became a great Islamic hero.

The title *Nizam al-Mulk*, meaning 'good order of the state', was given to Abu 'Ali al-Hasan al-Tusi, a Persian scholar and politician who served as senior *wazir* or minister to the Saljuq Sultans Alp Arslan and his son Malik Shah. Born around 1018, he is said to have studied at Nishapur. After fleeing the Saljuq conquest and finding service under the rival Ghaznawids, Nizam al-Mulk attached himself to Alp Arslan's father Çağrı Beg. From there he moved to the service of Alp Arslan who was then governor of eastern Khurasan. It was the start of a close working relationship, which continued

A map of the Turkish peoples and their neighbours in the *Diwan Lughat al-Turk* by Mahmud al-Kashgari, written in 1076 (Milet Genel Kütüphanesi, Ms. Ali Emiri, Arabi no. 4189 ff.22–23, Istanbul)



Inside the medieval old city of Edessa, now called Urfa. (Author's photograph)

when Alp Arslan became Saljuq Sultan. Apart from being a highly effective and loyal administrator, Nizam al-Mulk also wrote the *Siyasatnama*, a remarkable treatise on the art of government.

Sav-Tekin was a eunuch in Alp Arslan's service and although little is known about him, he was originally a slave. Rising to be Alp Arslan's senior officer, probably commanding the elite *ghulams*, Sav-Tekin was campaigning in Georgia alongside the *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk in 1068. It seems likely, though unconfirmed, that he was the eunuch and military commander whose troops supposedly included the 'puny' *ghulam* of Byzantine Greek origin who captured Emperor Romanos IV at the battle of Manzikert. Identified as *Tarang* in the Byzantine chronicles – probably a corruption of the senior Persian military title of *sarhang* – Sav-Tekin may have been through the long training and education outlined in Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatnama*. Early in 1095 Sav-Tekin served as governor of the town and citadel of Damascus under Alp Arslan's son Tutuş but two years later Sav-Tekin's ambitions got the better of him and he was executed by a rival, Zahir al-Din Tugtakin.

The name **Afşin** was originally a princely title given to the rulers of Ushrusana in Central Asia during the 7th–8th centuries AD. However, little is known about the early career of the Türkman tribal leader **Afşin Ibn Bakği Beg**. Playing a significant role before and during the Manzikert campaign, Afşin Ibn Bakği clearly had a volatile temper, resulting in excessive cruelty to his enemies and his own occasional disgrace. The fact that Alp Arslan pardoned him after he had killed a fellow Turkish commander suggests that Afşin's services were too useful to lose. He subsequently served as a commander under Alp Arslan's son Tutuş during the Saljuq conquest of Syria in the later 1070s, where he earned a terrifying reputation because of the devastation his men wrought between Aleppo and Ma'arrat al-Nu'man. However, Afşin fled when Sultan Tutuş had another Türkman leader murdered.

OPPOSING FORCES

BYZANTINE FORCES

By the 1060s the Byzantine army, though currently in one of its weaker phases, nevertheless had a long and proud heritage. Its basic structure appears to have remained little changed for centuries, with each *tourma* brigade supposedly consisting of three to five *droungoi* battalions, themselves theoretically consisting of five *banda* companies of 200 to 400 men. The *bandon* remained the basic tactical unit for both cavalry and infantry. The cavalry included heavily armed lancers and light cavalry armed with bows or javelins. The quality of training and equipment may have declined since the 10th century, but confidence is said to have remained high, especially when it came to ranged battle against an enemy who stood to fight.

The territorial military structure had undoubtedly been modified in recent decades, with the three military provinces, *ducat*es or *katepanates* on the eastern frontier now being Chaldia in the north-east, Mesopotamia east of the Anti-Taurus mountains, and Antioch closer to the Mediterranean coast. A detailed study of the Byzantine army during this period has estimated that there were around 10,000 in Iberia, 5,000 in Vaspourakan, 3,200 in Mesopotamia, 3,000 in Taron, 12,000 in Derzene, Choazanum, Arsamosata, Charpezicium and Melitene taken together, plus a further 12,000 in other smaller military provinces.²

Despite the chroniclers' emphasis on the political struggle between military and civilian or bureaucratic elites, the gap between these sections of Byzantine society was not so wide; intermarriage being common. It would be similarly misleading to equate the 'great families' of the 11th-century Byzantine Empire with a western European form of entrenched territorial aristocracy. Instead, the most powerful of these established families were more like extended clans, some of which believed they had as much right to the Imperial throne as any other 'great family' currently ruling the Empire.

The ceramics made at Nishapur in eastern Iran from the 9th to 11th centuries were often decorated with stylized figures like this armoured cavalryman, clearly showing the military equipment of the period. (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. Author's photograph)



² Treadgold, W., *Byzantium and its Army, 284–1081* (Stanford, 1995) 83.



After the Saljuq Turks conquered the old Romano-Byzantine citadel of Theodosiopolis, now Erzurum, they added some fine buildings including the Hatuniye Gunbat funerary tower. (Author's photograph)

In the Byzantine Empire military obligations had traditionally been individual rather than feudal, devolving upon leaders of families, which were also obliged to supply 'their' soldier with his equipment. Possession of land had been a secondary consideration, though this had begun to change during the 10th century when military obligations started to be shared between groups of families, largely because cavalry service was increasingly expensive. Such costs

almost certainly reflected the fact that, by the time of the Manzikert campaign, the traditional light cavalry *stradioti* of the Byzantine frontier regions had declined, though they would later be revived. The chronicles also suggest that indigenous Byzantine horse archers had become rare, resulting in a need to hire foreigners.

On the other hand the traditional Byzantine system of command and control remained effective and there may have been an increase in the use of different forms of military flag since Late Roman times. The Byzantine defeat outside Manzikert may, in fact, demonstrate how its commanders still had a notable ability to manoeuvre small bodies of troops whereas they had difficulty with larger forces. Above all, however, Manzikert would highlight failures in Byzantine morale and discipline.

While it is clear that the Imperial authorities put significant effort into maintaining a system of major roads for military and administrative reasons, these mainly ran between the north-west and south-east. There had also been a revival of interest in the theoretical aspects of warfare since the mid-10th century, perhaps resulting from greater confidence following the defensive attitudes that had prevailed earlier. Nevertheless, events showed that this offensive strategy brought with it defensive vulnerabilities.

The Empire now relied upon a thinly stretched chain of small border *themes*, each centred upon a fortress, manned by a small garrison and controlled by a *strategos* or governor. In practice, however, many smaller fortifications were maintained in a condition ready to be garrisoned, but not actually housing garrisons, though the major frontier cities were properly manned. Theoretically the new *themes* were under the control of regional military units called *ducates* or *katepanates*, which were themselves under a senior field officer with the title of *dux* or *katepan* headquartered in a key frontier fortress with a substantial garrison. In practice *theme* forces had shrunk during the 10th century, with the emphasis shifting to a more centralized army. In certain important areas the Byzantine Empire had also handed much military control to powerful local leaders, some of whom would prove unreliable.



SALJUQ FORCES

Alp Arslan's army in 1071 was not a simple horde of Türkmen tribal warriors, nor was it entirely Turkish. On the other hand it was not one of those professional armies that had characterized the more powerful of previous Middle Eastern states. Alp Arslan's was a mixed force consisting of assorted tribal or volunteer elements around an elite corps of professional *ghulams* of supposed slave origin.

The early Saljuq army had largely been of Türkmen tribesmen following their own chieftains. Equipped and maintained at their own expense, they maintained themselves on campaign from their own family resources to which they might hope to add booty. Ordinary tribal warriors did not receive regular payment, though their leaders may have done so, if only in terms of gifts from a ruler who wanted to retain their loyalty.

What most set the Türkmen apart from existing professional Middle Eastern armies was their fluid system of authority and loyalty. Amongst these Turks a tribal *khan* or leader's position was either acknowledged – or not – by the men of his tribe. Acceptance depended upon his being part of a suitable aristocratic family as well as showing himself capable of leadership. Significantly, a *khan* could expect to be obeyed in war, whereas in peacetime his interference in the everyday affairs of the tribesmen would not be welcomed.

Once established as rulers of the ancient civilization of Iran, the Saljuqs were surrounded by a court structure in which rank and status were paramount, yet the Sultan was not so powerful that he could afford to neglect the interests and sensibilities of tribal and clan leaders, nor of powerful individuals whose loyalty was maintained through favours, titles and gifts. During this period the Saljuq court was also remarkably mobile, moving across huge distances and as a result the Saljuq Sultans ruled 'from the saddle'

'The Betrayal of Christ' in an Armenian Gospel dating from the 11th century. (Matenadaran Library, Ms. 9974, Yerevan)



The road along the north shore of Lake Van has to cross a rugged promontory east of Adilcevaz, probably marking the frontier between Byzantine and Marwanid territory. (Author's photograph)

as did so many medieval Western European rulers, but unlike the Emperors of Byzantium who ruled through a massive bureaucracy centred upon Constantinople.

This old system of limited government worked well during the initial phases of Saljuq conquest, but once the Saljuqs found themselves in control of a largely settled and substantially urbanized realm which included an array of different languages and traditions, they had little choice but to turn to established Persian-Islamic forms of centralized and bureaucratic government. This would have a profound impact upon their armies, which soon needed a

permanent, professional and paid, central force – in other words an *askar*. For centuries such *askars* had relied upon *ghulam* soldiers, supposedly recruited from slaves, though current research suggests that the origins of such men were more complicated than had previously been thought. The most highly prized of such *ghulams* were Turks from the steppes, though they included others. The origin of the Saljuq version of this venerable military system was around the time of the taking of Baghdad, only 16 or so years before the Manzikert campaign.

Saljuq *ghulams* eventually numbered between 10,000 and 15,000 troops, modelled upon the army of the rival Ghaznawid dynasty. Some of its earliest members may have been ex-members of that Ghaznawid army while including others 'mopped up' from different states overthrown or absorbed by the Saljuqs as they marched westward. Such a permanent professional army required a 'tail' of support forces and administrators, and it was here that Persian-speaking bureaucrats played a major role. The unruliness and frequent disaffection of the Türkmén further contributed to the Saljuq rulers increasingly turning to the existing Iranian minor aristocracy, the *dihqans*, to help govern their state.

The archaic but nevertheless prestigious military and administrative ideals that lay behind this tradition can be seen in the military advice which Nizam al-Mulk included in his *Siyasatnama*. Nevertheless, this presented an ideal rather than a current reality. For example, it is unclear whether Saljuq rulers were willing to adopt Nizam al-Mulk's recommendation for a multi-ethnic army in which Iranians, especially Daylami infantry from the north of the country, would counterbalance the need to rely overmuch on Turks. Arabs and Kurds had been enlisted in substantial numbers by the Saljuqs' Buwayid predecessors, but their role in Saljuq armies seems to have been temporary, as volunteers or auxiliaries. The resulting armies varied in size and could vary from 40,000 to a supposed 100,000 for major expeditions during the great era of Saljuq conquests. Later Saljuq armies were assessed at around 10,000 to 15,000 men.

OPPOSING PLANS

The Manzikert campaign provides an example of how the fluidity of medieval international politics could lead to even greater fluidity in medieval military planning.

THE BYZANTINE PLAN

Following the limited results of his 1069 campaign, Romanos IV rejected defeatist advice to abandon the Empire's recent gains and fall back in defence of Anatolia, probably believing that the existing fortresses and provincial garrisons were in no state to serve as a front line. It was probably then that the Emperor decided to launch an offensive in 1071, thus giving the Empire time to get ready. Even a devaluation of Byzantine coinage seemed worthwhile if it helped these military preparations.

Romanos' primary military objective was to rid the Empire of Türkmen raiding by reimposing effective Byzantine control over Armenia as an effective frontier zone, perhaps mirroring the situation around Antioch and Edessa where the Byzantine military position remained strong. There were also political considerations, chief amongst which was to consolidate his own position through military success. Whether the Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes also hoped to establish a Diogenes Imperial dynasty to replace the previous Dukas dynasty is more debatable.

Nevertheless, the Byzantine army would be campaigning in regions where agriculture had declined over recent decades, where food supplies for men and animals would make huge demands upon the army's logistical support. The noted historian

This remarkably well-preserved wall painting comes from a ruined palace in Nishapur and dates from around the 10th–early 11th century. (Archaeological Museum, Tehran. Author's photograph)





Hisn Kayfa, now Hasankayf, was a major fortified city in the Marwanid amirate, which played a major role in the events of 1070–71. (Author's photograph)

of medieval warfare, John Haldon, has suggested that roads in this part of the Empire were no longer suitable for wheeled transport and hence armies had to rely upon baggage animals. The resulting requirement for a huge number of such animals meant that an army moving east would denude a broad area even before it entered regions which had suffered decades of warfare and raiding.³

The frontier barrier which Romanos and his advisers envisaged would mean retaking the strategic area north of Lake Van and even if it proved impossible to stop Türkmén raiding entirely, the recently installed Saljuqs could be evicted and the Sultan stopped from consolidating his hold on Byzantine territory.

Key to this plan were the fortified towns and citadels of Manzikert (retaken by Alp Arslan in 1070) and Ahlat which would give the Byzantines command of the Upper Euphrates (Murat) Valley. Furthermore, they might enable the Byzantine army to press farther east, even retaking the province of Vaspourakan. If the Saljuq army could also be defeated, so much the better. However, it is not clear that the Emperor Romanos envisaged challenging the Sultan Alp Arslan in battle.

THE SALJUQ PLAN

During 1070 Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslan, his *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk and senior military commanders planned, prepared and began the execution of an ambitious military campaign. Its aim was to draw the autonomous Kurdish and Arab amirates in the Jazira and northern Syria into the Saljuq sphere

³ Haldon, J., 'La logistique de Mantzikert', in Barthélemy, D. and Cheynet, J.-C. (eds.), *Guerre et Société au Moyen Âge, Byzance-Occident (VIIIe-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 2010) 16–22.

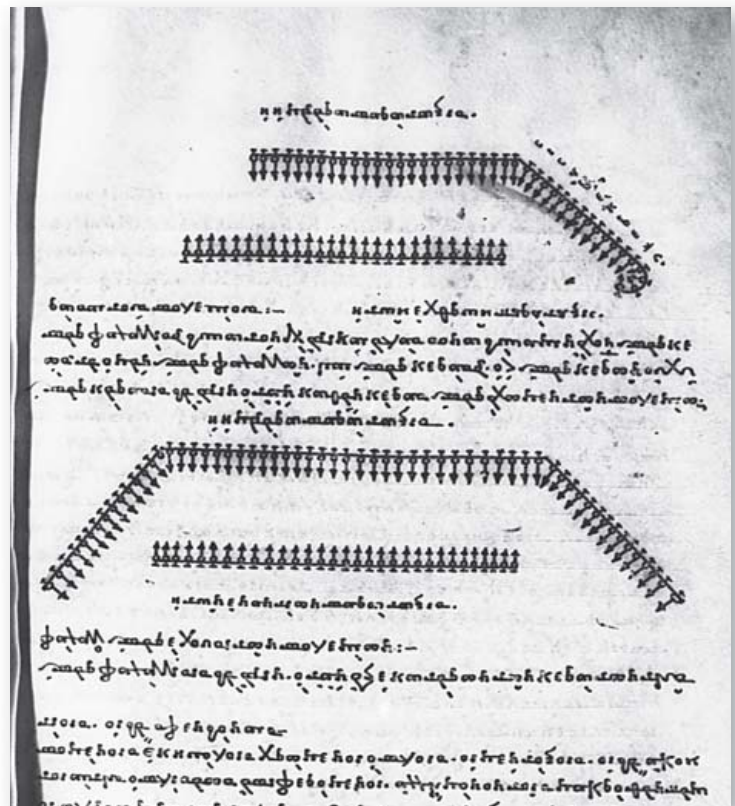


Malekan is an irrigated area on the south-eastern side of Lake Urmia which produced the spring pasture essential for the mustering of a largely mounted army. (Author's photograph)

through diplomacy or war. This would pave the way for a campaign against the Fatimid Caliphate's remaining garrisons in Syria. The Byzantine Empire featured in this inter-Muslim warfare only as a source of potential distraction. However, those Türkmen tribes who continued to raid Byzantium were rarely under Saljuq control though the Sultanate was usually blamed for their activities.

Alp Arslan may have made a serious strategic error in believing that, following the feeble Byzantine reactions in recent years, he could afford to let Byzantines and Türkmen sort matters out between themselves. Consequently, the campaign launched by Romanos at the start of 1071 caught Alp Arslan by surprise. The latter's genius was shown in the way he responded, abandoning his initial plan and developing a new one; doing so while withdrawing in haste from northern Syria to Azarbaijan. Much of the credit for the execution of this new plan must go to Nizam al-Mulk, and for later 11th-century Sunni Islam the Turkish Sultan and his Persian *wazir* would truly be a 'dream team'.

A page from a Byzantine military manual written in the 11th century, explaining various battlefield manoeuvres. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Grec. 2442, Paris)



THE CAMPAIGN

ALP ARSLAN INVADES SYRIA

Medieval fascination with omens recalls the tendency of modern historians and journalists to be wise after the event. Matthew of Edessa was typical in drawing attention to a presumed comet seen in the sky during 1070–71, recording: ‘many said that it was the same omen which had appeared before and after which much bloodshed had occurred... So this was the beginning of the second devastation and final destruction of our country by the wicked Turkish forces, because our sins had increased and spread’.⁴

Meanwhile Egypt was still suffering the effects of a prolonged famine, which would appear to have been one of the worst in the country’s history. When people were reduced to cannibalism, a lack of horses, mules and asses would seem a minor matter. But, even if Bar Hebraeus exaggerated when claiming that only three horses were left in the country and those belonged to the Fatimid Caliph, such a situation obviously had serious military repercussions. Meanwhile the Fatimid Caliph’s *wazir* Nasir al-Dawla Ibn Hamdan may have lost his job but he retained considerable power. So his suggestion to Alp Arslan that the Sultan seize the opportunity to overthrow the Shi’a Caliphate was taken seriously – if more cautiously than Nasir al-Dawla wished.

In fact Alp Arslan decided to strengthen the Saljuq position along the Byzantine frontier before invading nominally Fatimid Syria. Religiously and politically his position was also strengthened when, in 1070, the *sharif* or dominant figure in Mecca, Muhammad Ibn Abi Hashim, informed Alp Arslan that the *khutba* in this, Islam’s most sacred place, was now being proclaimed in the name of the ‘Abbasid Caliph and Saljuq Sultan, rather than that of the Shi’a Fatimid Caliph. It was welcome news, which Alp Arslan tried to consolidate by allotting the *sharif* a generous pension. An embassy from the ‘Abbasid Caliph also convinced the *amir* of Aleppo to have the *khutba* read in his name, though there is no accompanying recognition of Saljuq suzerainty.

In 1070 Alp Arslan first marched west and retook Manzikert. According to some sources he released its garrison but according to others the garrison had already fled. Alp Arslan’s troops also retook Archech where, according to Bar Hebraeus, the Byzantine garrison was treated more harshly. Both these

⁴ Matthew of Edessa (tr. Dostourian, A.E.), *Armenia and the Crusades, tenth to twelfth centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa* (New York, 1993) sect. 55.

fortified towns might have been handed back to nominal Marwanid authority as represented by the governor of Ahlat, but were clearly given Saljuq garrisons.

The Saljuq army then proceeded towards the Upper Tigris Valley, the heartland of the Marwanid amirate, on the way to its main objective of Byzantine-ruled Edessa. The situation in the Jazira and Syria was currently fluid and Alp Arslan was not the only leader attempting to strengthen his position. In 463 AH (1070/1) 'Ali Ibn 'Uqail, the governor of Tyre and Safad, having revolted against the Fatimid Caliphate, was attacked by Badr al-Jamali

the Fatimid governor of Syria who was, nevertheless, virtually confined to the coast having lost control of Damascus to the Ibn Manzu clan. 'Ali responded by engaging Qaralu, a recently arrived Türkman tribal leader, who in turn attacked Badr al-Jamali. It was into this complex but promising situation that Alp Arslan planned to launch his major anti-Fatimid campaign.

At first things went well for the Sultan who had sent his *wazir*, Nizam al-Mulk, to Mayyafariqin, which was one of two centres of Marwanid authority in the Tigris Valley. According to the *Chronicle of Mayyafariqin* by Ibn al-Azraq al-Fariqi, 'He [Nizam al-Mulk] came on the occasion of Alp Arslan's campaign against the Greeks in 463 AH [9 October 1070–29 September 1071]. The Amir [Nasir al-Dawla] was alarmed; he entertained



A carving high on the 10th-century Armenian Church on Aght'amar Island shows a horse archer shooting at a wild animal. His costume, appearance and equipment reflect the strong eastern influence in medieval Armenia. (Author's photograph)



In the mid-11th century the massive citadel of Bitlis, south-west of Lake Van was a key defensive position for the Marwanid amirate. (Author's photograph)



This bowl, made in Nishapur, probably in the 10th century, shows a fully armoured cavalryman wearing a long-sleeved mail hauberk with a mail coif over his head and wielding a war axe. (Reza Abbasi Museum, Tehran. Author's photograph)

the *wazir* sumptuously; and two of his sisters and his wife implored the good offices of their powerful guest, who assured them that he would turn their brother from an Amir into a Sultan.'

In so saying Nizam al-Mulk exceeded his authority because Nasir al-Dawla's demoted brother Sa'id was under the impression that he had been promised Alp Arslan's support. Sa'id may have been correct because other sources maintain that, in his fear, Nasir al-Dawla made additional tax demands upon his subjects, enabling him to offer 100,000 dinars to Alp Arslan

on his arrival. This, according to some Muslim sources, the Sultan returned, stating, 'he did not want the peasants' money'. The *Chronicle of Mayyafariqin* went on to describe how the Marwanid *amir* was 'received by Alp Arslan with much favour'. Unfortunately Nizam al-Mulk's over-eager promise remained a problem because there could be only one Sultan – Alp Arslan himself – so Nizam suggested that Nasir be given the title of *Sultan al-Umara*, chief of the *amirs* and thus senior amongst those petty rulers who had accepted Saljuq suzerainty.

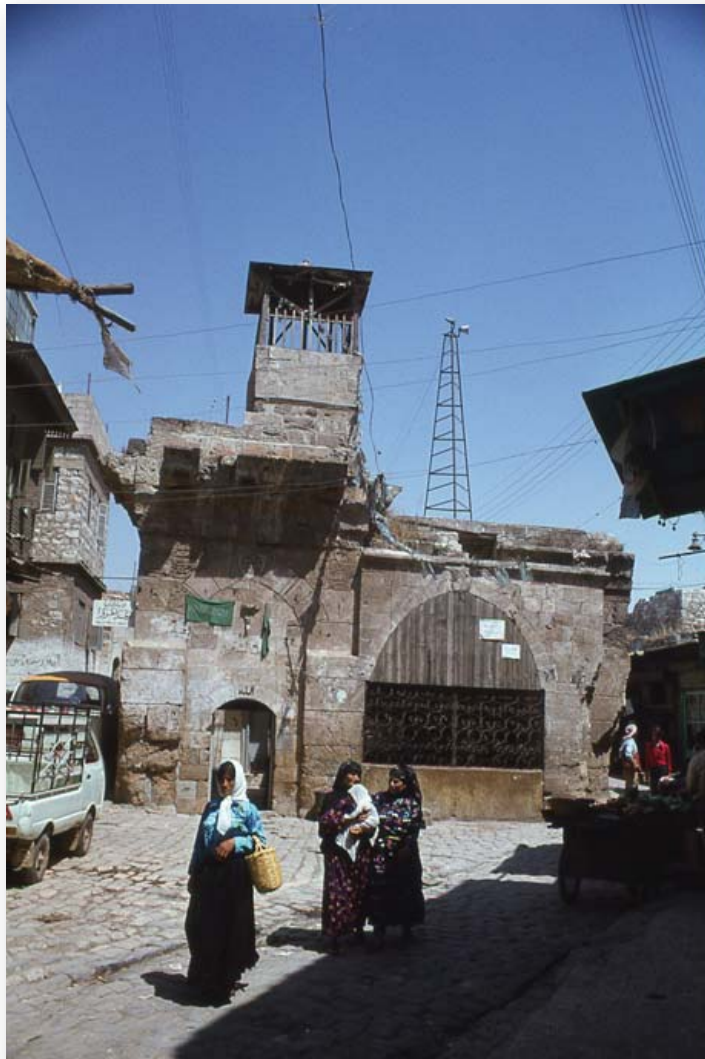


A stream runs close to the southern wall of Manzikert, now Malazgirt, but is almost clogged with rubbish as this is a poor part of town. (Author's photograph)

Unfortunately there remained the squabble between the current *amir* Nasir al-Dawla and his demoted brother Sa'id. Alp Arslan wanted no problems at his back while campaigning in Syria. Here the evidence is conflicting, some indicating that Sa'id was obliged to accompany Alp Arslan's army, others claiming that Alp Arslan went on a convenient hunting trip, leaving Nizam al-Mulk to arrest Sa'id and have him taken to al-Hattakh near Sa'id's powerbase of Diyarbakr. Alp Arslan then went to the massively fortified city of Diyarbakr but instead of seizing control he camped outside its gates, feeling benevolent towards its inhabitants because his wife had just given birth to a new son, named Tutuṣ. Bar Hebraeus wrote that the Sultan: 'drew nigh to its wall, and he passed his hand over it and then over his face, as if to be blessed by its strength'.

Though it was winter, Alp Arslan led his army over the mountains towards Edessa. On the way he seized several significant Byzantine border fortresses. Some were taken by storm but (unidentified) Tulhum resisted so strongly that Alp Arslan began negotiations. This made the defenders relax their guard, whereupon some of Alp Arslan's troops – against his orders – suddenly overwhelmed the fortifications. According to Matthew of Edessa, 'When Alp Arslan heard of this, he was surprised and deeply regretted the slaughter of the inhabitants, for he had taken an oath [not to harm them].'

It would be Edessa's turn next and here Alp Arslan is said to have been accompanied by Abu'l-Aswar, the Shaddadid *amir* of Dvin in the eastern Caucasus. Shawar Abu'l-Aswar was one of the most renowned *ghazi* 'fighters for the Faith' but he had already been succeeded by his son Fadl Ibn Abu'l-Aswar. So it was probably this less famous Shaddadid ruler who fought beside Alp Arslan. Once again the Byzantine garrison put up such resistance that the siege stalled. Having been bombarded for 30 days (50 according to Matthew of Edessa) the defending commander, the *dux* Basil, suggested that Edessa pay 50,000 dinars on condition Alp Arslan destroyed his siege weaponry. This the Saljuq Sultan did, whereupon Basil refused to pay. Humiliated but unable to continue his siege without siege machines, the enraged Alp Arslan led his army across the Euphrates, against the much larger Muslim city of Aleppo.



The Tuteh Mosque in Aleppo is one of very few structures surviving from the 11th century. (Author's photograph)



An unusual representation of the story of David and Goliath in a late 10th-century Byzantine ivory panel portraying Goliath as an armoured cavalryman. (Cathedral Treasury, Sens)

During his unsuccessful siege of Edessa, the Saljuq Sultan had received an embassy from Emperor Romanos IV, proposing a truce. According to Bar Hebraeus the Byzantines may have thought that Alp Arslan wanted to regain recently lost Manbij (Hierapolis), so the envoy offered to hand this back in return for the Saljuqs' returning Manzikert and Arcech. Alp Arslan responded favourably then set off for Aleppo, not attacking Byzantine-held Manbij on the way.

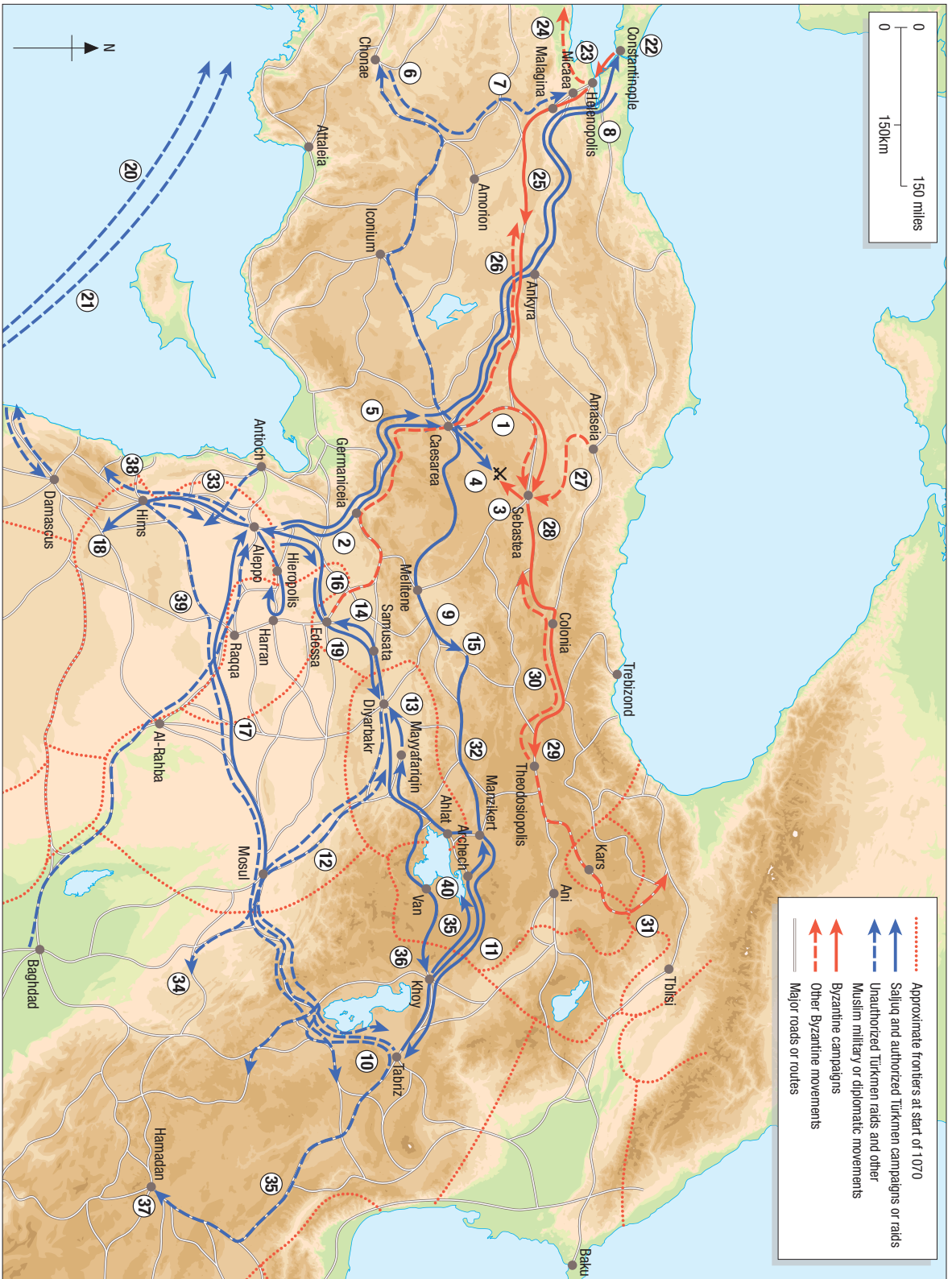
Alp Arslan's siege of Aleppo proved as futile as his attempt upon Edessa, though it was brought to an end by events farther north. Most of the small Muslim states along the Byzantine frontier had accepted Saljuq suzerainty, including the Marwanids of Mayyafariqin and Diyarbakr, and Sharaf al-Dawla the 'Uqaylid ruler of Mosul. The only significant exceptions were Mahmud Ibn Nasir the *amir* of Aleppo and the fragmented Numayrid amirate, which dominated much of the Euphrates Valley east of Aleppo.

Alp Arslan arrived outside Aleppo some time in late January or early February 1071, but before starting his siege he sent a substantial force southwards, past Hims as

far as Qaryatayn on the road from Damascus to the Euphrates. This area was ravaged before the raiders returned to the main Saljuq army, which had camped between Qinisrin and al-Funaydiq. The reasons for this raid are unrecorded but it might have been to discourage Damascus from helping the potentially troublesome Numayrids.

- 1 Manuel Comnenus moves to Sebastea because of Türkmen raiders.
- 2 Yavuki Türkmen commanded by Erigsen ibn Yunus cross the Taurus to raid Cappadocia.
- 3 Manuel Comnenus is ordered to attack Erigsen.
- 4 Erigsen ibn Yunus captures Manuel Comnenus on banks of the Halys then leads his men west against Alp Arslan's orders.
- 5 Alp Arslan sends army under Afşin to bring back Erigsen.
- 6 Erigsen is persuaded by Manuel Comnenus to enter Byzantine service.
- 7 Erigsen and his followers go to Constantinople.
- 8 Afşin reaches coast near Constantinople and demands that Emperor hands over Erigsen but Romanos refuses.
- 9 Afşin attempts to cross the Taurus in winter but is trapped by snow.
- 10 Nasir al-Dawla Ibn Hamdan, the Fatimid *wazir* in dispute with the Fatimid Caliph, sends delegation encouraging Alp Arslan to overthrow Fatimids.
- 11 Alp Arslan invades Byzantine Armenia, taking Arcech and Manzikert, summer 1070.
- 12 Alp Arslan sends Nizam al-Mulk to Mayyafariqin to heal quarrel between the Marwanid *amir* Nasr Ibn Ahmad and his disinherited brother Sa'ïd (after 9 October 1070).
- 13 Alp Arslan marches to Diyarbakr, where his son Tutuş is born.
- 14 Alp Arslan besieges Edessa; an ambassador arrives from Romanos proposing the restoration of a previous truce.
- 15 Governor of Tyre and Safad revolts against Fatimid authority, is attacked by governor Badr al-Jamali of Damascus, hires a Türkmen chieftain to attack Badr al-Jamali.
- 16 Alp Arslan abandons siege of Edessa and marches towards Aleppo.
- 17 'Uqaylid *amir* reportedly brings army to support Saljuq siege of Aleppo.
- 18 Saljuqs raid as far as Hims and Qaryatayn.
- 19 Saljuq demonstration towards Harran is checked.
- 20 Embassy from Fatimid Caliph to Romanos IV urges revival of previous alliance.
- 21 Rival delegation is sent by Fatimid army commander, Nasir al-Dawla.
- 22 Romanos prepares a major campaign, winter of 1070–71; sends embassy to Alp Arslan during latter's siege of Edessa.
- 23 Romanos and Balkan troops cross the Bosphoros; army assembles at Helenopolis.
- 24 Romanos sends pardoned Norman mercenary rebel Crispin and his troops to Abydos.
- 25 Byzantine army marches to Sangarius River, end of March.
- 26 Paul the *katepano* of Edessa is recalled to Romanos' camp; returning Byzantine ambassador reports Saljuqs to be weak.
- 27 Hervé Phrangopoulos, joins the Emperor's staff from Amasea.
- 28 Major clash between Byzantine army and Armenians in Sebastea.
- 29 Byzantine army reaches Theodosiopolis, late June.
- 30 Romanos sends Erigsen ibn Yunus back to Constantinople.
- 31 Romanos sends small force to assist Bagrat IV in Georgia.
- 32 Afşin returns to Azarbaijan, early 1071.
- 33 Second Byzantine embassy demands that Alp Arslan control Türkmen raiders; Alp Arslan learns that Emperor Romanos is already marching east so abandons his siege of Aleppo, 26 April 1071.
- 34 Alp Arslan dismisses bulk of his army which disperses, some as far as Central Asia.
- 35 Alp Arslan and his *askar* head for Khoy, recruiting Kurdish troops on way, while Alp Arslan's family and the *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk go to Hamadan.
- 36 Alp Arslan establishes base between Khoy and Salamas.
- 37 Nizam al-Mulk organizes mustering of new army; professional *ghulam* troops also mustered in Baghdad.
- 38 Mahmud of Aleppo occupied Baalbak, accompanied by Turkish mercenary Aytakin al-Sulaymani; Mahmud's rival 'Atiyya finds refuge in Antioch from where he attacks Ma'arat al-Numan, so Mahmud returns to Aleppo.
- 39 Aytakin al-Sulaymani rejoins Alp Arslan.
- 40 Alp Arslan advances towards Lake Van, early August 1071.

Alp Arslan's unwanted war

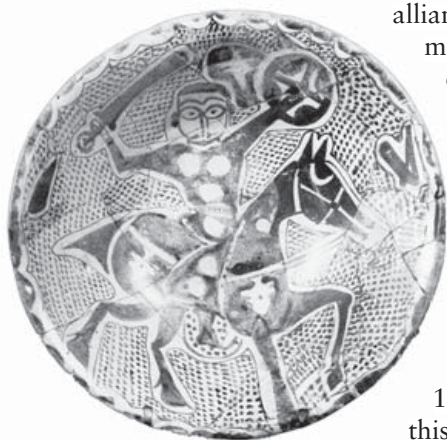


Little remains of the great fortress known as the Taht-i Sulayman at Ahlat, on the northern side of Lake Van but it was a strongly garrisoned Muslim outpost in 1071. The area was also known as Dhat al-Jawz or 'Rich in Nuts' under Arab rule. (Author's photograph)



Alp Arslan raised his tent upon an ancient settlement or *tel*, thereafter known as Tal al-Sultan. Still Mahmud refused to submit and the Sultan was reluctant to make a direct assault on an Islamic city that was also a key position in Islam's resistance to a resurgent Byzantine Empire. A thrust against Numayrid-ruled Harran failed and for a while Alp Arslan seemed unsure what to do. Meanwhile a blockade continued, along with a steady bombardment of Aleppo's fortifications. It was during this that the citizens wound a huge black cloth around one of their main towers, the Burj al-Ghanam, sending their tormentors a message that the bombardment had given their tower a headache. This was more than mere defiance, as the throwing away of such quantities of expensive textile demonstrated Aleppo's great wealth. Alp Arslan felt the insult and ordered his archers to shower the civilian areas of Aleppo with arrows. In response one of the defenders' stone-throwing mangonels killed the Sultan's horse as he was riding too close to the fortifications.

Most troops in Alp Arslan's army were Turks or Kurds but the Arab vassals of the Saljuq Sultan also contributed troops like the light cavalryman shown in this early medieval Iraqi ceramic. (Keir Collection, London)



It looked like stalemate. In the meantime the Fatimid Caliph and, it seems, his 'rebel' *wazir* sent rival embassies to the Byzantine capital, seeking an alliance. Neither of the competing powers in Egypt could offer much militarily and for the Fatimid Caliph it was a purely diplomatic exercise. Perhaps the Caliph wanted to encourage Romanos in his proposed campaign towards Armenia rather than coming to the support of Aleppo, which had already abandoned its Fatimid allegiance.

In fact Fatimid affairs had reached virtual anarchy. The remaining Fatimid territories in southern Syria and Palestine were wracked by civil war between Badr al-Jamali, supporters of the ousted *wazir* Nasir al-Dawla Ibn Hamdan and those seeking their own families' advantage. Nasir al-Dawla even reportedly sent 'rich presents' to the Byzantine Emperor during 1071 in a somewhat optimistic attempt to win his support, though this probably happened after the battle of Manzikert.



Manzikert sits on a hilltop (left) joined to the plateau (right) by a narrow hill. Emperor Romanos probably placed his fortified siege camp on the edge of the plateau. (Author's photograph)

ROMANOS ASSEMBLES AN ARMY AND MARCHES EAST

The Byzantine Emperor was aware of Alp Arslan's campaign when he ordered the mustering of Imperial forces. He must also have hoped that the Sultan's difficulties outside Aleppo would make a Byzantine campaign into Armenia easier, but the Armenian chronicler Aristakes Lastivertc'i's assertion that Romanos: 'decided to make war, in order not to appear unmanly and frightened, and in order not to leave to posterity a bad impression of himself', said more about Armenian prejudice than strategic reality.⁵

In fact Byzantine preparations were well advanced when the Emperor sent his embassy to Alp Arslan outside Edessa. Meanwhile Romanos and his senior officers had been successful in making large numbers of men with limited military experience into adequate soldiers during the winter of 1070–71, the troops mustering in late February and March. The Byzantine army had similarly assembled an impressive siege train, though whether this assembled near Constantinople or in Theodosiopolis is unclear.

Precisely when the Emperor attempted a peaceful accommodation with the new Norman rulers of southern Italy is unknown, but it was either during the preparations for the great expedition or shortly after it set off. Facing more serious matters in the east, Romanos apparently accepted the inevitable loss of Byzantium's final toehold in Apulia to these Norman conquerors and therefore proposed an alliance based upon the marriage of one of Romanos' sons to one of the Norman leader's daughters. The offer was rejected and Bari eventually fell anyway. Under such circumstances the Byzantine Emperor had to leave significant garrisons in the Balkans to watch the Normans and the threatening Hungarians. Some members of the Varangian Guard were similarly left in Constantinople.

⁵ Aristakes Lastivertc'i (tr. Bedrosian, R.), *Aristakes Lastivertc'i's History; Sources of the Armenian Tradition* (New York, 1985) 166–67.



Herod's soldiers pursuing Elizabeth, Zechariah and the infant John the Baptist, in an early 12th-century Christian wall painting made under Saljuq rule. (*in situ* Chapel 11, Göreme, Cappadocia. Ahmet Soğut photograph)

All sources agree that the army that Romanos mustered was large and very mixed. At its centre were elite units including the *Heteria*, *Scholai*, *Stratelatai* and some Varangians. These would serve as a firm foundation for less reliable troops. Not all the other units were clearly identified though they included Balkan troops from Bulgaria, local *tagmata* from Cappadocia, perhaps from the *themes* of Colonia, Charsianum, Anatolics, Chaldia and Armeniacs. Nevertheless some of these eastern provincial troops had low skill and morale. More reliable, perhaps, were units from Cilicia and Bithynia along with small numbers of *tagmata* from the Syrian frontier. There were also many Armenian infantry though it is not clear where they were drawn from.

More is known about the varied foreign mercenaries, most important of whom were 'Franks', largely Normans, under Roussel de Bailleul, and Germans who would however disgrace themselves early in the campaign. A substantial detachment of Oghuz and Pecheneg Turks may have been vassals or allies rather than mercenaries. Arab and Persian chroniclers added Rus probably meaning the Varangians, Khazars, Alans, Kipchaks, Persians, Georgians and Abkhazians from the Caucasus. According to al-Husayni writing in the early 13th century, 'Byzantium threw its own lifeblood at the sultan and the earth brought forth its burdens of men and equipment. To this king there flocked [those] from rabble elements ... people by whom discords extend their forearms and by whose gathering together Christianity elevated its foundations.'⁶

Numbers given for the size of Romanos' army range from the slightly exaggerated to the simply absurd. A figure of 30,000 to 40,000 would be realistic, though there may also have been an additional 20,000 support personnel, while the figure of 30,000–40,000 may not have included infantry levies joining the army as it marched eastward. All sources agree that the siege train was huge and included impressive siege machines. Al-Turtushi, an Andalusian scholar writing in Fatimid Egypt, provided the earliest account of this campaign. He noted that the Byzantines: 'had prepared an innumerable amount of animals, weapons and mangonels and pieces of equipment made ready for conquering citadels in war'. Ibn al-'Adim added: 'With the Byzantines were three thousand carts carrying the heavy baggage and the mangonels. Amongst them was a mangonel with eight beams; it was carried by a hundred carts.'

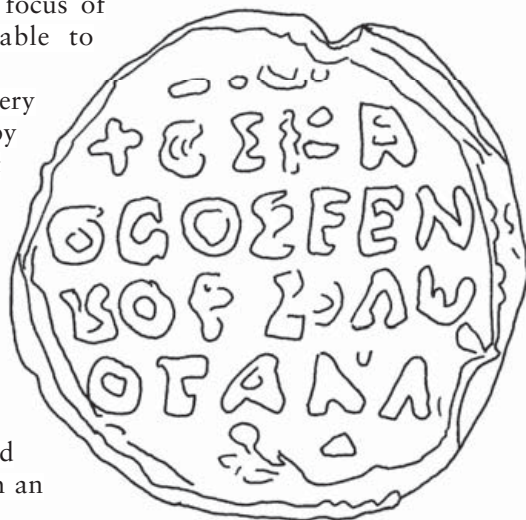
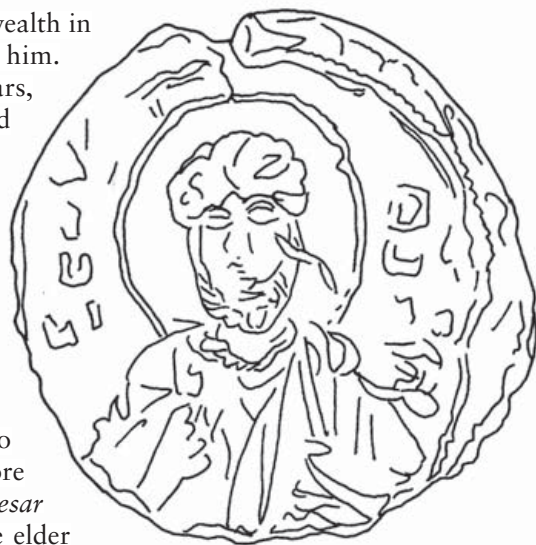
6 Hillenbrand, C., *Turkish Myth and Muslim Symbol* (Edinburgh, 2007) 53.

Others seem to have been more impressed by the wealth in the treasury, which Romanos also brought with him. According to Sibte al-Jawzi it included ‘a million dinars, 100,000 silk garments and a similar number of gold saddles, belts and gold jewellery’. Greek, Armenian and Muslim chroniclers employed the wisdom of hindsight to condemn the Byzantine Emperor’s presumed overconfidence, Aristakes Lastiverte’i maintaining: ‘Seeing such a multitude of troops assembled in one place, he arrogantly grew proud, thinking it impossible to be vanquished.’ This would be given the lie by Romanos’ cautious actions during the campaign, despite the fact that his envoy, Leo Diabatenus, returned from his meeting with Alp Arslan outside Aleppo to report the Saljuq army to be weak and frightened. Before leaving Constantinople the Emperor also made the *caesar* John Dukas and his sons swear loyalty, then sent the elder Dukas ‘across the Bosphoros’ where this potential focus of political opposition would supposedly be less able to cause trouble.

In an age when omens and portents were taken very seriously, a number of disturbing events were recorded by subsequent chroniclers. According to Sibte al-Jawzi it was Romanos himself who told Alp Arslan, following his capture, how he had gone to the great church of Santa Sofia to pray before his campaign: ‘And there was the cross which had fallen from its position in the direction of the Islamic *qibla*. I was amazed at that and I re-arranged it towards the east. The following day I came to it and there it was inclining towards the *qibla*. So I ordered it to be bound in chains. Then I entered on the third day and there it was inclined towards the *qibla*.’ Even if the Emperor did give such an account, he was probably trying to placate his captor.

With the probable exception of the Emperor’s guard units, the army mustered on the eastern, Anatolian side of the straits, Romanos himself crossing during the second week of March. That was when the next omen supposedly occurred: a pigeon alighting on his ship and then on his right hand, though none was sure whether this was a good or bad sign. Byzantine forces traditionally assembled at Nicomedia (İzmit) for eastern campaigns but instead Romanos ordered an initial muster at the naval base of Helenopolis (Hersek). This the soldiers unhelpfully nicknamed *Eleinopolis* or ‘miserable city’. Furthermore, the central pole of the Imperial tent broke, which all agreed was bad.

It is far from clear where the Byzantines assembled the huge herds of cattle, which served as food on the hoof for the army. Units from eastern and southern garrisons would join the army along the way, at the Sangarius (Sakarya) River, or Sebastea or Theodosiopolis. Amongst them was Paul the *proedrus* who was recalled from his command as *katepan* of Edessa, who may have joined the Emperor at Helenopolis bringing up-to-date, though not necessarily correct, information about Alp Arslan’s army outside Aleppo.



A lead seal of Hervé Phrangopoulos, a high-ranking Norman soldier in the Byzantine army during the second half of the 11th century. (Private collection, Paris)



The rebuilt Mausoleum of Baba Tahir in Hamadan marks the grave of a Kurdish-Persian *sufi* poet who lived at the time of the Saljuq Sultans Tughril Beg and perhaps Alp Arslan. (Author's photograph)

Nemitzoi German mercenaries who were accused of commandeering provisions without paying. When the Germans complained that some of their comrades had been killed, Romanos did not support them but instead sent other troops to remove these *Nemitzoi* from their previous place of honour. Nor was morale helped by the presence of unburied bodies in an area recently ravaged by Türkmen raiders. It may have been around this time that Hervé Phrangopoulos, who had probably been campaigning from Amasea against these Türkmen, joined the Emperor's staff.

Further problems emerged when the Byzantine army reached Sebastea, where a substantial Armenian colony was accused by the Greek inhabitants of siding with the Türkmen. Matthew of Edessa claimed that, despite being courteously received by two local Armenian leaders, Romanos snubbed both of them, as well as ex-King Gagik and Erigsen Ibn Yunus the Türkmen chief who had come over to the Byzantines. The Emperor then ransacked part of the Armenian quarter, declaring: 'When I finish battling against the Persians, I shall do away with the Armenian faith.' Local Armenian monks reportedly cursed him, while the Emperor's officers hurriedly pointed out that many in the army were also Armenians.

While the army prepared for the first stage of its march, a detachment of Normans was sent to, or left in, Abydos on the Dardanelles under the command of the pardoned Norman rebel Robert Crispin. During the early medieval period, Malagina on the Sangarius River was the first major military staging area on the road from Constantinople. It was around here that Emperor Romanos decided to send back those generals whom he did not trust, including the highly experienced Nikephoros Botaneiates. The even more doubtful Andronikos Dukas was nevertheless kept close to the Emperor.

The army was now reorganized before heading for Sebastea. Sending most of the troops ahead, Emperor Romanos remained to supervise the construction of a new fortress but, on the march, further unfortunate things happened. Some would later be called omens as well as practical setbacks, such as a fire destroying much equipment and killing many animals. Meanwhile the Emperor became morose, separating himself and his camp from his men.

Perhaps a lack of close supervision lay behind the violence that erupted between local people and some

Romanos now summoned a military council to discuss whether to invade enemy-controlled territory or stay put and strengthen Byzantine defences. While Nikephorus Bryennios and the respected Georgian *magistros* Joseph Tarchaniotes urged caution, many younger officers urged a major strike towards Lake Van. What the Emperor needed was accurate information about Alp Arslan's actions and intentions, and this he definitely did not receive. In fact, the messages that reached the Byzantine headquarters were wholly misleading.

Romanos thus decided on an offensive and, seemingly carried away with the enthusiasm of younger commanders, proclaimed that the Saljuqs and Türkmén would be driven back to Central Asia. According to some Islamic sources the Byzantines were now so confident that they appointed governors for regions they expected to conquer, including the Jazira, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Khurasan and Egypt. However Sibt al-Jawzi noted: 'He [Romanos] made an exception of Baghdad and he said, Do not attack that upright shaykh [the Caliph], for he is our friend'.

The Byzantine army now marched to Theodosiopolis where its organizational structure was changed from a line-of-march to an offensive formation. Yet beneath this veneer of confidence Romanos remained uncertain, sending Erigsen Ibn Yunus and his Türkmén back to Constantinople for fear they might change sides again. He also sent a small force to assist in his Bagratid ally regaining control of Georgia.



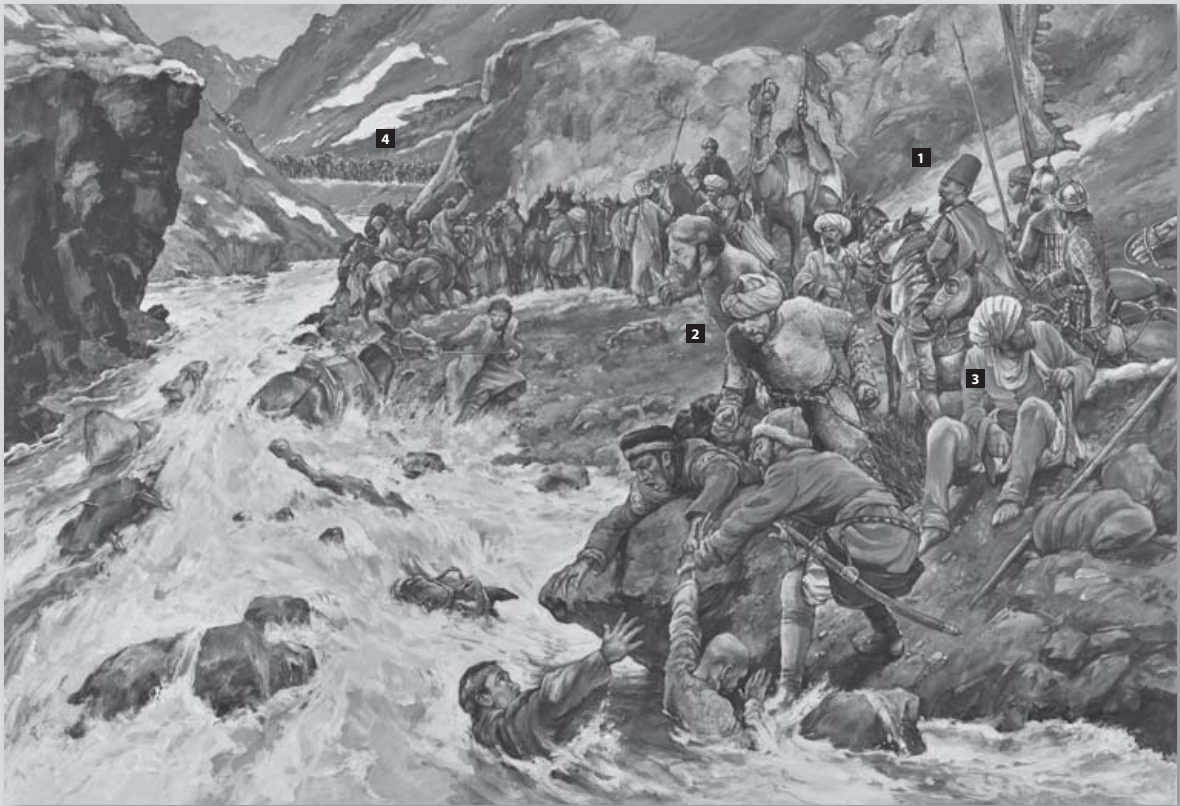
Carvings on the Church of San Nicola in Bari were made about 30 years after the battle of Manzikert and show the Byzantine-influenced equipment used by Norman mercenaries from southern Italy. (Author's photograph)



Harput was another vital fortified frontier outpost between the Byzantine and Islamic worlds during the 11th century. (Author's photograph)







ALP ARSLAN'S ASKAR CROSSING A FLOODED RIVER IN SOUTH-EASTERN TURKEY DURING THEIR RETREAT TO AZARBAYJAN, MID-MAY 1071 (PP. 44–45)

After lifting his siege of Aleppo, the Saljuq Sultan Alp Arslan (1), led his army east, across the mighty river Euphrates and north-western Mesopotamia, into the uplands of the upper reaches of the river Tigris. Here the bulk of the army was dismissed. Sultan Alp Arslan then pressed on with his 4,000-strong *askar* 'household troops' of *ghulams* (elite *mamluk* troops of supposed slave-recruited origin) (2), plus their servants (3) and a baggage train (4). With these elite units, Alp Arslan was able to push through the mountains of what is now south-eastern Turkey. They were heading for Khoy in what was the traditional military mustering area of Azarbayjan (the province in north-western Iran rather than

the modern independent state of the same name) where they would be pasture for the cavalry's horses. However, the late spring which promised ideal mustering conditions in Azarbayjan also meant that the mountain snows of eastern Anatolia were melting. So the little army had to cross several rivers that were already in flood. Many of the baggage animals and even some cavalry mounts had already been swept away in the hurried crossing of the river Euphrates east of Aleppo. It now seems that others were lost in the rush to reach Khoy. On the other hand, Alp Arslan was able to recruit substantial numbers of warlike local Kurdish tribes during this difficult and dangerous journey.



An 11th-century stucco wall decoration from Rayy, northern Iran, probably portraying an early Saljuq ruler. (Archaeological Museum, Tehran. Author's photograph)

ALP ARSLAN'S SUPPOSED 'FLIGHT' FROM ALEPPO

Matthew of Edessa maintained that Saljuq siege engineers had breached Aleppo's fortifications but that Alp Arslan still could not take the city. To add to the Sultan's concerns the Emperor Romanos sent a second embassy, which supposedly arrived on the day that Alp Arslan learned of the start of the Byzantine campaign. It could not, therefore, have arrived in May as by then the Sultan had already abandoned his siege of Aleppo. This time Leo Diabatenos, the Emperor's ambassador, demanded the exchange of towns mentioned by the first embassy and insisted that the Sultan stop all further Türkmen raids, which Alp Arslan was in no position to do. Furthermore the Sultan's correct assumption that the Byzantine army was already heading towards Armenia meant that the Emperor's ultimatum should be interpreted as a declaration of war.

If Alp Arslan believed that a truce had been agreed as a result of the first Byzantine embassy back in March, he must have seen the Byzantine campaign as a betrayal. Whether he saw it as offering him a face-saving excuse to abandon his siege of Aleppo is doubtful. Mahmud, the *amir* of Aleppo, is more likely to have been offered a face-saving formula. According to some sources he offered to recognize Saljuq overlordship while leaving Aleppo with his mother. According to others, Alp Arslan left one of his sons to supervise things around Aleppo.

A lost work by the Baghdad chronicler Ghars al-Ni'ma Ibn Hilal al-Sabi', written shortly after the event, probably provided the chronicler Ibn al-Qalanisi with the information that Alp Arslan left Aleppo on 23 Rajah 463 AH (26 April 1071). The following day he and his army crossed the Euphrates 'on horseback without boats', according to al-Husayni. At that time of year the river would be in flood as snows melted in the Taurus Mountains, so it is not surprising that large numbers of animals and baggage were lost. Perhaps the Emperor Romanos had believed such a crossing was impossible.



An ivory chess knight from Iran, dating from the 11th or 12th century. (Metropolitan Museum, Rogers and Straka Gift 1974.207, New York. Author's photograph)

Alp Arslan now had from 15,000 to 20,000 horsemen, including his *askar* numbering 4,000 *ghulams*. This force was strong enough to discourage the Byzantine garrison in Edessa from attacking and indeed Matthew of Edessa claimed that: 'The *dux*... provided him with horses, mules, and victuals. Taking these, the sultan passed through the confines of Edessa, unharmed, and went in an easterly direction towards the mountain called Lesun [probably the Karacadağ].' Perhaps this helpful Byzantine governor was the supposedly 'perfidious Roman' who, according to Matthew of Edessa, sent Alp Arslan a letter urging him not to flee 'for the greater part of our forces is with you'. Perhaps that was why, when he reached the security of Marwanid territory, Alp Arslan sent the bulk of his exhausted troops home while he led his tough and loyal *askar* of 4,000 across the

mountains of Kurdistan to Khoy in north-western Iran.

The routes taken by both parts of the Saljuq army are unknown, though those heading homeward are thought to have travelled via Mosul before scattering across Iran, Iraq and beyond. Alp Arslan probably travelled via Diyarbakr, through the mountains south-east of Lake Van, gathering Kurdish volunteers along the way. The fact that it took him two months highlights the immense difficulty of even a small force traversing these mountains and crossing streams swollen by melting snow.

Whether his *wazir* Nizam al-Mulk, his wife the Khatun al-Safariyya and infant son Tutuş remained with Alp Arslan or took the easier road is unknown. The Sultan's family and the army's remaining baggage then headed for Tabriz or Hamadan while Nizam al-Mulk set about raising a fresh army. Emperor Romanos, however, received the dangerously inaccurate information that Alp Arslan had fled to Iraq.

Azərbayjan's abundant spring pasture made it a traditional mustering place for armies and Khoy could serve as a forward base, close to the mountains of Armenia. The Saljuq Sultan therefore established himself and his growing army between Khoy and Dilmagan (Salmas) where further troops gradually joined him. Nizam al-Mulk was busy in Tabriz and other major cities including Hamadan, Isfahan and perhaps Baghdad, summoning troops from across the Saljuq sultanate and its vassals.

In Tabriz or Baghdad (there are two versions of the story) the *ghulam* who would later capture the Byzantine Emperor was amongst those mustered for inspection. Being described as 'puny', this man failed the tests and would have been dismissed until a senior man, sometimes identified as Nizam al-Mulk, joked: 'What can be expected of him? Will he then bring captive to us the Roman Emperor?' For whatever reason, the anonymous *ghulam* was then accepted and would later win himself a small niche in the hall of fame.

For his part, Alp Arslan declared himself a *ghazi* – a Fighter for the Faith – and in so doing proclaimed that the forthcoming struggle would be fought in the name of God, not in that of the Saljuq Sultan. He also stated that, should he be killed, his son Malik Shah was to succeed him. Ibn al-Jawzi



Manzikert (now Malazgirt) citadel seen from the location of the Byzantine siege camp in 1071. In the distance is the Upper or Eastern Euphrates River. (Author's photograph)

Byzantine lead seal, c.1070, found during archaeological digs in Winchester, southern England. (Winchester Excavations 1962, no. 1141A. Winchester Excavations Committee photograph)

wrote that this was well received by his commanders: 'They responded to him with prayers and hearing and obeying. That was by the doing, organizing and judgement of Nizam al-Mulk... Each *ghulam* had a horse to ride and a horse to go by his side.' By the time that Alp Arslan led his army against Emperor Romanos, it may have numbered up to 30,000 men, including up to 15,000 elite cavalry upon whom the outcome would ultimately depend.

Mahmud, the Mirdasid *amir* of Aleppo, did not accompany the Saljuq Sultan on this campaign. Instead, in May 1071, he took a Turkish mercenary named Aytakin al-Sulaymani and an army of Banu Kilab Arab tribesmen to seize Ba'albak in Lebanon. From there Mahmud planned to take Damascus which was currently under the control of Mu'alla Ibn Manzu, the Fatimid governor of Syria, Badr al-Jamali, having been confined to a few coastal ports. Mahmud's ambitions were nevertheless thwarted when his uncle 'Atiyya, having found refuge in Byzantine Antioch, pillaged the central Syrian city of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man. Mahmud hurriedly returned to secure his powerbase in Aleppo while Aytakin al-Sulaymani took his men to join Alp Arslan in Azarbayjan. In Syria the stage was set for the Saljuq conquest, but first Alp Arslan had to face Emperor Romanos IV.

Al-Turtushi recorded that the Byzantine advance caused concern across the Islamic countries and although that was probably an exaggeration, it was clearly a serious threat. Amongst several events which boosted Alp Arslan's confidence was the 'Abbasid Caliph's order that a specially written prayer should be read in all mosques. It was the work of a respected Islamic scholar named Abu Sa'id Ibn Mawsilaya and it asked God to: 'Grant the sultan Alp Arslan, the Proof of the Commander of the Faithful, the help by which his banners are illuminated... Cause his troops to be helped by Your angels and his decisions to be crowned with good fortune and a happy outcome.'⁷



7 Hillenbrand, *op. cit.*, 53.



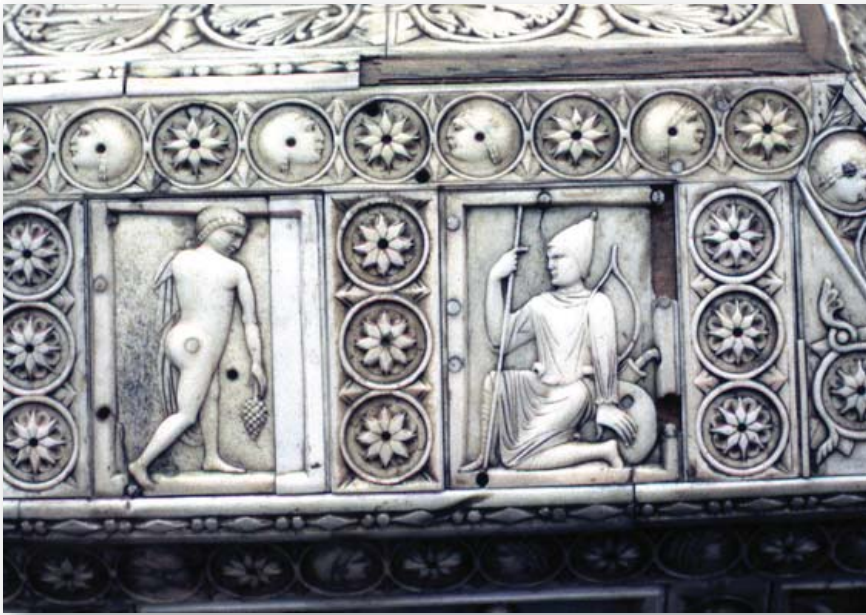
Looking towards Manzikert from a rocky outcrop on the plateau south of the town, perhaps where Alp Arslan studied the Byzantine fortified siege camp. (Author's photograph)

THE ARMIES APPROACH

It would seem inconceivable that Emperor Romanos did not learn that Alp Arslan was assembling an army north of Lake Urmia. However, it is generally accepted that, in June or July, the Byzantine leader was very badly informed. Convinced that Alp Arslan had 'fled' from Aleppo in apparent rout, he probably assumed that Saljuq military preparations were defensive. The chronicler Nikephoros Bryennios specifically blamed the Emperor's disastrous decision to divide his army on a letter sent by the *vestarchos* Leo Diabatenos, the man who had led the Byzantine embassy outside Aleppo. Its contents show that it was written some time later when Leo Diabatenos may have been responsible for Byzantine intelligence reports and it maintained that the sultan, being aware of Romanos' expedition and fearing its strength, had left Persia (western Iran) and fled to Babylon (Baghdad).

Other sources of information proved equally misleading, as when the Armenian officer Basilakes arrived at the head of substantial reinforcements from Syria and Armenia. Final Byzantine preparations were now being made at Theodosiopolis, where, however, the huge Byzantine army seemed to be in danger of running short of food in an area ravaged by Türkmen raids. Romanos was nevertheless confident his numerically superior troops could defeat a Turkish army in open battle and may also have been confident that he could achieve his objectives before Alp Arslan appeared – if he ever did.

So the order to advance was given. Romanos ordered his men to assemble provisions for a two-month campaign in an area where food and fodder would be scarce. Such a volume of supplies would require so many pack animals and perhaps carts that Byzantine movements would inevitably be slow. It was probable that, as the main army set off, a detachment of Pecheneg auxiliaries was sent south to the area around Ahlat. It was closely followed by a detachment of Frankish cavalry under Roussel de Bailleul. Their role, it is said, was to secure the harvest for the Imperial army and prevent it from being gathered by Saljuq garrisons.



An 11th- or 12th-century Byzantine carved ivory panel showing a man armed with spear, sword and bow. (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Author's photograph)

The Emperor and his main army then moved slowly eastwards along a major route and over relatively easy ground, reportedly defeating a Türkmen force and retaking the unidentified fortress of Mempet on the way. Having reached a point (probably Kapetron) where his heavily burdened army could cross the hills, Romanos turned southwards towards Xinus (Hinis) and then towards the Murat River. Quite where the Byzantine army divided is unrecorded though the Murat would seem likely. Somewhere, however, Romanos ordered almost half of his troops, including many of the most effective cavalry, to support those already operating under Roussel around Ahlat.

Under the command of the *magistros* Joseph Tarchaniotes they were to blockade Saljuq-held Ahlat, perhaps even seizing it by a *coup de main*, though there was no mention of siege equipment with this force. It nevertheless included Varangians and Armenians from the *ducate* of Theodosiopolis. Whether they really totalled almost half the army seems doubtful. Byzantine sources are silent but some Muslim chroniclers maintained that they were commanded by the enemy's 'hardest commander' and had with them their 'greatest cross'.

The fact that Tarchaniotes had disagreed with the Emperor's offensive strategy was taken by both chroniclers and modern historians as a reason for the seemingly feeble actions of a highly rated commander. In fact the approaching defeat is not inexplicable, especially when one looks more closely at the written evidence and the terrain. Emperor Romanos was presumably confident that having much of his army almost 50 kilometres away from the main force was not a problem. He could recall it if serious danger threatened or he could hurry to its support if necessary. It would be a matter of timing and terrain, both of which the Byzantine commanders got wrong. Meanwhile Romanos headed for the fortified city of Manzikert with his massive siege train. Perhaps he then planned to march east to retake the strategic northern shore of Lake Van and perhaps even Vaspourakan, leaving the strong fortress of Ahlat to be dealt with later.



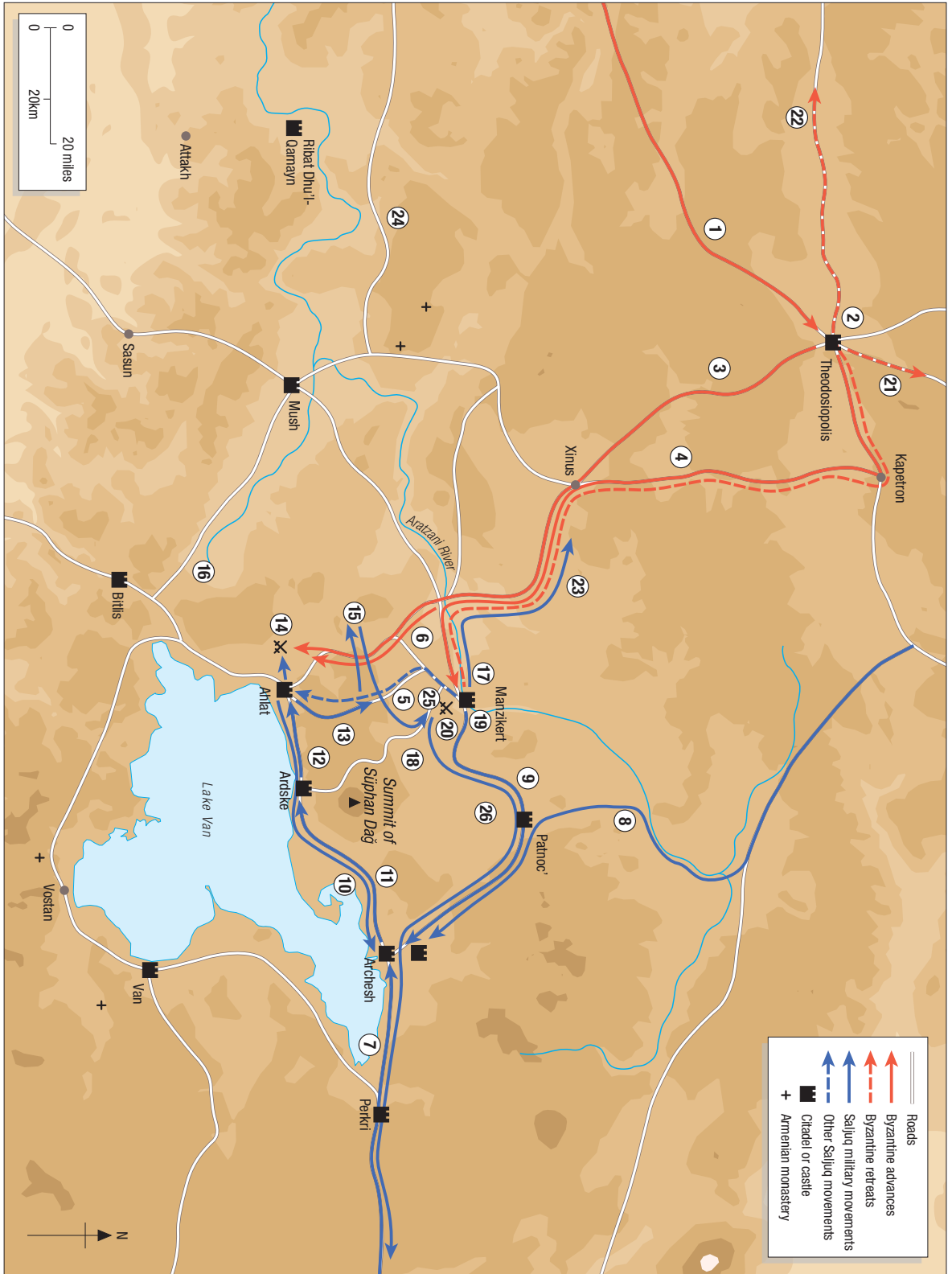
The northern fortifications of Manzikert (Malazgirt) town. (Author's photograph)

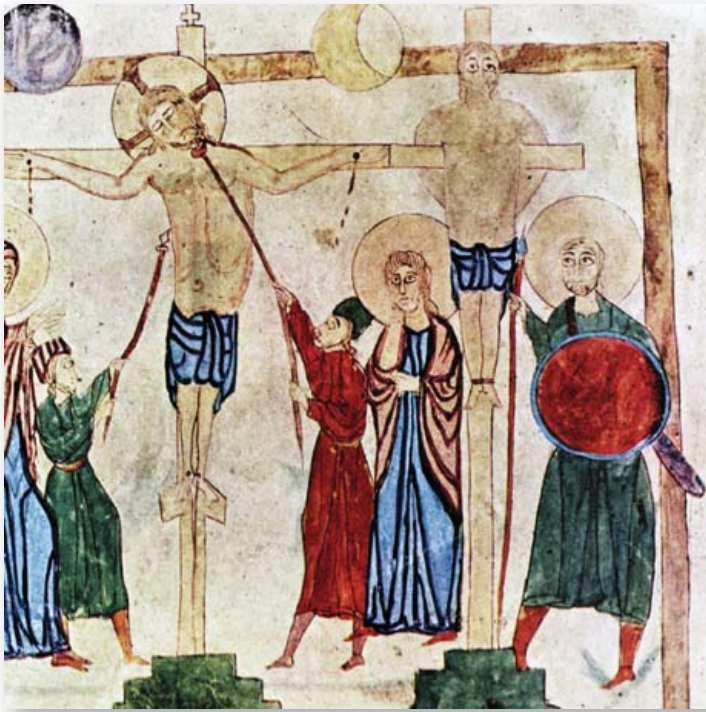
The details of Alp Arslan's movements at this point are less well known than those of the Emperor Romanos. According to Ibn al-Azraq al-Fariqi, 'A large group of the people of Ahlat and Manzikert went down after him [Alp Arslan], informing him that the king of Byzantium had come back to the country... With them was the *qadi* [senior judge] of Manzikert.' These may have been from the Saljuq garrisons or from their local militias, and it must have occurred after the Byzantine army moved out of Theodosiopolis. All the evidence points to Alp Arslan being regularly and accurately informed of Byzantine movements – perhaps even of Byzantine intentions – a stark contrast to the situation in the Byzantine camp.

The Sultan had meanwhile arranged the command structure of his army near Khoy. Rashid al-Din claimed that it numbered 15,000 cavalry (perhaps referring only to the Turks) and 5,000 'veteran' infantry, naming the tribal leaders as Artuq, Saltuq, Mengüçük, Danişmand, Çavlı and Çavuldur. Several would go on to found ruling dynasties of their own, so Rashid al-Din may have drawn upon heroic tradition rather than reliable reports. The Sultan

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| <p>1 Basilakes with substantial forces from Syria and southern Armenia, joins Emperor, bringing incorrect information about Saljuqs.</p> <p>2 Letter from Leo Diabatenos informs Romanos that Alp Arslan fled from Persia to Iraq; Emperor reorganizes army for two a months campaign.</p> <p>3 Romanos sends Pechenegs, closely followed by Roussel de Bailleul and Normans, towards Ahlat to seize control of the harvest.</p> <p>4 Romanos heads for Manzikert with main force, mid-August.</p> <p>5 Joseph Tarchaniotes is sent with up to half the army to help Roussel, probably taking direct road west of Manzikert.</p> <p>6 Warning is probably sent by Manzikert garrison to Ahlat and Alp Arslan.</p> <p>7 Alp Arslan and his army arrive from Khoy.</p> <p>8 Alp Arslan is joined by Türkmen <i>begs</i> who were raiding Anatolia.</p> <p>9-10 Alp Arslan is joined by a large part of garrisons and militias of Manzikert and Ahlat.</p> <p>11 Route taken by Alp Arslan is unclear, but a route north of Lake Van is more likely.</p> <p>12 Small Saljuq force under Sundak al-Turki hurries to strengthen Ahlat garrison.</p> | <p>13 Alp Arslan probably intends to strengthen garrison in Manzikert.</p> <p>14 Joseph Tarchaniotes and Roussel de Bailleul are defeated outside Ahlat, Tuesday 23 August.</p> <p>15 Move by Alp Arslan may have cut Joseph and Roussel off from Romanos.</p> <p>16 Joseph Tarchaniotes and Roussel de Bailleul retreat to Muş, perhaps intending to rejoin the Emperor via Eastern Euphrates valley.</p> <p>17 Romanos arrives outside Manzikert, probably Monday 22 August.</p> <p>18 Alp Arslan makes camp at the northern edge of the Süphan Dağ.</p> <p>19 Saljuq garrison in Manzikert surrenders late on Tuesday 23 August.</p> <p>20 Romanos IV is defeated and captured by Sultan Alp Arslan, Friday 26 August 1071.</p> <p>21 Fleeing Byzantine court heads for Trebizond.</p> <p>22 Large numbers of fleeing Byzantines find refuge in Dokeia.</p> <p>23 Saljuqs pursue Byzantines, perhaps as far as Doghodaph.</p> <p>24 Joseph Tarchaniotes and Roussel de Bailleul pull back to Harput and Melitene.</p> <p>25 Alp Arslan releases Romanos after eight days.</p> <p>26 Alp Arslan returns to Azarbayjan.</p> |
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Lake Van, the crucible





Unlike most Byzantine illustrations of the Crucifixion, the centurion shown in this Armenian Gospel of 1038 is unarmoured. (Matenadaran Library, Yerevan)

may also have been joined by Kutalmış' sons Sulayman and Mansur, along with other Türkmen *begs* who had been raiding Anatolia. The size of Alp Arslan's army before the battle of Manzikert is unknown, though it was probably half that of the Byzantine total but – more importantly – not much smaller than the force which remained with the Emperor outside Manzikert. Nishapuri naturally allows himself considerable poetic licence in his epic *Saljuqnama* but was probably not far off the mark when he wrote: "They [the victorious Saljuq army] recited the verse: "How often a little company has overcome a numerous company by God's name."

Alp Arslan's route from Khoys to Ahlat is unknown, and he could have gone along the southern shore of Lake Van, thus threatening

Roussel and Tarchaniotes from the rear. But such a route would be longer, more difficult, slower and would have pushed the defeated Byzantine commanders towards their Emperor, whereas in fact they fled in the opposite direction. All that Sibte al-Jawzi writes in his chronicle is: 'He [Alp Arslan] set out making for the king of Byzantium. He sent one of the chamberlains who were with him with a group of *ghulams* as an advance party for him.' The latter rushed to support the exposed garrison of Ahlat so the Sultan could be expected to follow this vanguard.



The plateau seen from the Byzantine camp outside Manzikert, southward towards Süphan Dağ mountain. (Author's photograph)

BYZANTINE DEFEAT AND BYZANTINE SUCCESS

The two battlefields of the Manzikert campaign, near Ahlat and outside the town of Manzikert, were both dominated by the Süphan Dağ, which, at 4,434m, rose almost 2,800m above the level of Lake Van. Seemingly an isolated volcanic peak, the Süphan Dağ is in fact part of a range of hills lying between the lake and Manzikert. Today's roads and tracks presumably follow much the same lines, determined by the terrain, as they did in the 11th century. There were, therefore, two possible routes between the Murat River west of Manzikert and Ahlat on the north-western shore of Lake Van. It is likely that the troops Roussel led and those who followed under Tarchaniotes took the easier, westerly road passing the small Nuzik lake and reaching Lake Van just west of Ahlat. This passed close enough to Manzikert for its garrison to have sent a warning to Ahlat and, more importantly, to have informed Alp Arslan.

Perhaps this is why the Sultan sent a substantial force of some 10,000 horsemen under Sanduq al-Turki hurrying forward to strengthen Ahlat which, according to Nikephoros Bryennios, 'was defended by a fairly strong Turkish garrison'. The Taht-i Sulayman citadel of Ahlat, though ruined by earthquakes, remains impressive and, enclosing about 11 hectares, was a much stronger position than better-preserved Manzikert.

Sanduq al-Turki had already shown himself to be an effective commander in Syria and Anatolia. He was now credited with saving Ahlat, arriving at almost the same time as Roussel and Tarchaniotes, a few hours ahead of the main Saljuq army. All that is known for certain is that the two Byzantine commanders were defeated, though not necessarily as a result of a bloody clash, despite Muslim chroniclers proclaiming the capture of a senior enemy officer along with the aforementioned 'great cross'.

Byzantine and Armenian chronicles merely accuse Roussel and Tarchaniotes of fleeing down the Murat Valley without warning their Emperor of the danger he now faced. Given the reputation of the two leaders, cowardice seems impossible and outright treachery also seems unlikely. The most logical explanation lies in the location of the confrontation, the fact that the Saljuqs were also in two main formations, and the nature of the terrain. Roussel and Tarchaniotes had presumably passed the crest of the hills and their troops may have been scattered, securing the harvest as instructed, when they found themselves confronted by the

The 'Legend of Abgar' frontispiece of the *Alaverdi Gospel*, was made in Antioch in 1054 which was a significant Christian cultural centre as well as a strategic Byzantine outpost. (Georgian Institute of Manuscripts, A 484, f.316v, Tbilisi)





The seemingly open plain south of the fortified Byzantine camp is crossed by small but steep-sided stream beds. (Author's photograph)

suddenly reinforced garrison of Ahlat. Nor had they reason to know that this was part of a much larger enemy army. If Alp Arslan was not in Ahlat, perhaps he was heading into the hills to reinforce his second garrison in Manzikert, logically taking the direct road across the western flank of the Süphan Dağ. Learning of the looming confrontation outside Ahlat, it would have been within Turkish military traditions and within Saljuq cavalry capabilities to turn off the road, along the open hillsides, to isolate Roussel and Tarchaniotes from Romanos.

A mail-clad cavalryman on a 10th- or 11th-century bowl from Nishapur. He wields a straight sword typical of the pre-Turkish Middle Eastern armies. (Museum für Islamische Kunst, inv. nr. I. 11/62, Berlin. Author's photograph)



If this hypothetical interpretation is correct, then the Byzantine commanders' rapid retreat southward along the lake shore and then down the valley to the citadel of Muş, made military sense. It might also explain how no warning got through to Romanos, the hills between Muş, Ahlat and Manzikert probably being dominated by Turkish horsemen and unhelpful local inhabitants. From Muş, Roussel and Tarchaniotes could rejoin their Emperor, north-eastwards along the main Murat Valley. But they did not and herein lies the only convincing evidence of betrayal. A few days later, after learning of the Emperor's defeat outside Manzikert, Roussel, Tarchaniotes and their men withdrew farther west, to Melitene.

The senior Rus commander, who was reportedly captured during this ignominious affair and who is then said to have had his nose cut off, may have been commanding the Varangian unit. The captured Byzantine cross was described as being of 'wood and on it were silver and pieces of turquoise, and a gospel in a silver casket'. Alp Arslan ordered that Sanduq send it to Hamadan with instructions that Nizam al-Mulk give it to the 'Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad.

The defeat of Roussel and Tarchaniotes took place on the same day – Tuesday 4 Dhu'l-Qa'da in the year 463 AH or 23 August 1071 – that Manzikert surrendered to the Byzantine Emperor. This makes Ibn al-Azraq's assertion that Alp Arslan stayed in Ahlat 'some days' unlikely as the Sultan is known to have been close to Manzikert two days



later. Romanos probably appeared outside Manzikert late on 22 August. The Saljuq garrison was probably smaller, and the defences undoubtedly more accessible for an attacker, than those at Ahlat. As such, Manzikert served the same purpose as it had under the Marwanids, as an outpost of the main defensive position in Ahlat. It overlooked the valley of the river Murat (Upper Euphrates) but was a few kilometres from it, lying at the northern edge of an extensive, seemingly level plateau. To the south rose the foothills and massif of Süphan Dağ.

The Byzantine chronicler Michael Attaleiates was with the Byzantine army and so the details of his account are accurate, even if his interpretation of events is less so. 'When the emperor came to Manzikert he ordered that the encampment with all its equipment be set up nearby and an entrenchment be made in the accustomed manner, while he, taking with him the elite of the army, went around the town, spying out where it was suitable to make attacks on the walls and to bring up the siege engines.'⁸

These Byzantine field fortifications were almost certainly on a hill, now partially occupied by a cemetery, facing the southern walls of the city and citadel. They gave the attackers a height advantage, security from sorties behind a steep gulley, and commanded the only piece of level ground leading to the fortifications. Furthermore, this location blocked the approach of any relief force from the south or east. To some extent the Byzantine position was also partially protected on that side by the bed of a small stream, which flowed across the plateau. Sadr al-Din al-Husayni added some colourful details: 'The Byzantine emperor set up a stately marquee (*fustat*) of red satin, a tent (*khayma*) like it and tents (*akhbbiya*) of silk brocade. He sat down on a throne of gold, above which was a golden cross set with priceless jewels, and before him was a host of monks and priests reciting the Gospel.'⁹

One of the streams that cut the apparently open ground between Manzikert and the Süphan Dağ. (Author's photograph)

⁸ Hillenbrand, *op. cit.*, 229.

⁹ Sadr al-Din al-Husayni (tr. Bosworth, C. E.), *The History of the Seljuq State: A translation with commentary of the Akhbar al-dawla al-saljuqiyya* (London, 2011) 38.



The subjects of medieval Islamic art tended to be less warlike than those in medieval European art, one of the most popular 'courtly' subjects being a musician as shown in this 11th-century silver plate from Iran. (Museum für Islamische Kunst, inv. Nr. I. 582, Berlin. Author's photograph)

Some sources suggest that, when faced by the Emperor's massive stone-throwing mangonels, the garrison surrendered without a fight. Others make it clear they at least made a show of resistance, 'shouting the war cry and baring their swords and using far-shooting weapons' as Romanos made his reconnaissance around their defences. Having returned to the Byzantine encampment, the Emperor ordered his Armenian foot soldiers to attack. They 'made many assaults' but nevertheless 'took it without a blow' in the late afternoon, suggesting that the confrontation was more

symbolic than bloodthirsty. In all probability the town fell with ease, whereupon the garrison in the citadel sent representatives to the Emperor, asking for and receiving clemency.

Having 'honoured the ambassadors with gifts', Romanos sent an officer to take control of the citadel but this seems to have disturbed the garrison who refused to hand over so quickly 'for fear that some evil might be wrought... by night'. This in turn made Romanos think the Saljuq defenders were renegeing upon their agreement. The battle trumpet was sounded and 'the entire army issued forth from the encampment, making for the walls', whereupon the terrified inhabitants promptly came out of Manzikert 'with their household effects and knelt before the emperor'. Unfortunately they still had their weapons, and Michael Attaleiates was appalled to see the unarmed Emperor Romanos 'who mingled without body armour among murderous men who pass their lives in recklessness and madness'.¹⁰ No one ever accused Romanos Diogenes of cowardice!

The Muslim chroniclers were probably correct in maintaining that the garrison of Manzikert formally surrendered on the promise of safe conduct on Tuesday 23 August. Most of the population were Christian Armenians, plus a smaller number of Muslims, and al-Bundari stated that they spent the night of Tuesday–Wednesday on the town's 'pavement' under the Emperor's protection. Other sources indicate that they evacuated Manzikert on Wednesday. Having placed a Byzantine garrison in the citadel, Romanos returned to camp where there were big celebrations, held, of course, in ignorance of the Byzantine defeat outside Ahlat and of the nearness of Alp Arslan's army.

¹⁰ Hillenbrand, *op. cit.*, 230.

CONFRONTATION, NEGOTIATION AND BATTLE

The sequence of events that immediately preceded the battle of Manzikert are straightforward. On Wednesday 24 August Alp Arslan heard of the fall of Manzikert and either now headed north or, if he was already marching northwards, did so with greater urgency. The distance was 46km as the crow flies, around 52km taking the most direct route, but of course Alp Arslan did not go all the way to Manzikert. Instead he established his camp somewhere in the northern foothills of the Süphan Dağ.

Michael Attaleiates reports that Emperor Romanos spent Wednesday having the defences of Manzikert repaired at the expense of its remaining inhabitants while also readying his army for the march to his next objective, Ahlat. Those of the people of Manzikert who either wanted or were obliged to leave were placed under escort, ready to march with the army. This, according to Islamic sources, coincided with the arrival of the Sultan's army, presumably at its camping place in the foothills. Byzantine sources initially focus upon affairs within the Imperial camp where Romanos imposed a degree of discipline that surprised even a supporter like Michael Attaleiates and reportedly undermined morale. One soldier had his nose cut off for stealing a donkey from a Turk but more shocking for the chronicler was that his call for mercy in the name of the Sovereign Mother of Blachernae, 'holiest of the icons carried by the Emperor', was ignored.

While this was going on, news came in that some Byzantine foragers were being attacked by Turks, but no one knew where these attackers had come from. As further reports came in, Romanos summoned Basilakes to ask his opinion. The Armenian officer was convinced the attackers came from the Saljuq garrison in Ahlat. The chronicler Nikephoros Bryennios (the Younger) somewhat unfairly blamed Basilakes for being overconfident in his assessment, which was, nevertheless, a natural one since there were, as yet, no reports of the Sultan's army being in the area.

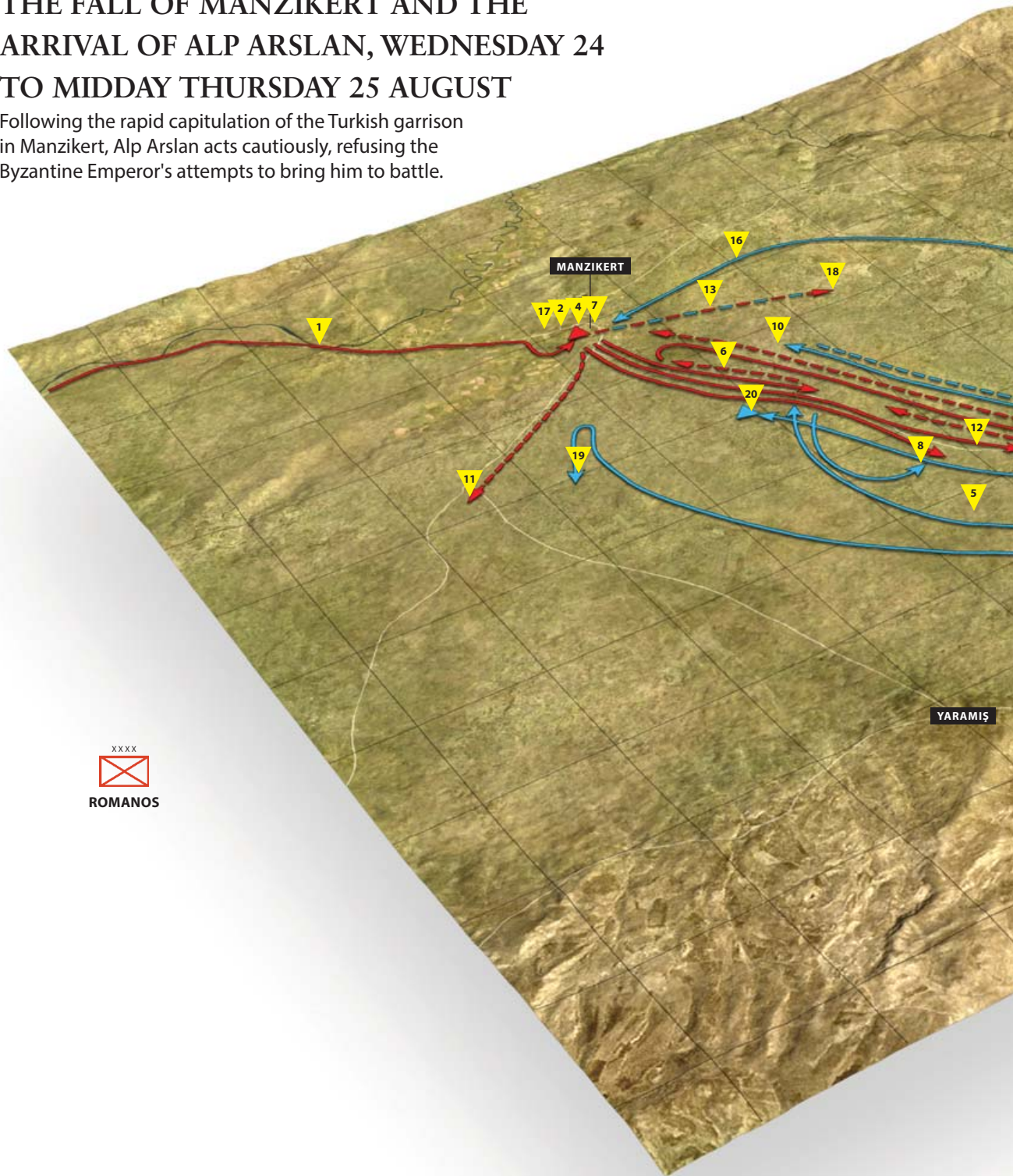
The Byzantine Emperor's error was his failure to send reconnaissance troops to get more accurate information. Instead, as harassment of the foragers grew worse, Romanos sent the commander of the army's left wing, the *magistros* Nikephoros Bryennios (the Elder) with a relatively small force to support these foragers. He in turn found himself facing more enemies than expected. His units were lured into ambushes and were in danger of being surrounded, so General Nikephoros Bryennios withdrew while requesting reinforcements. As Michael Attaleiates made clear, the enemy fought in their traditional and very effective manner:

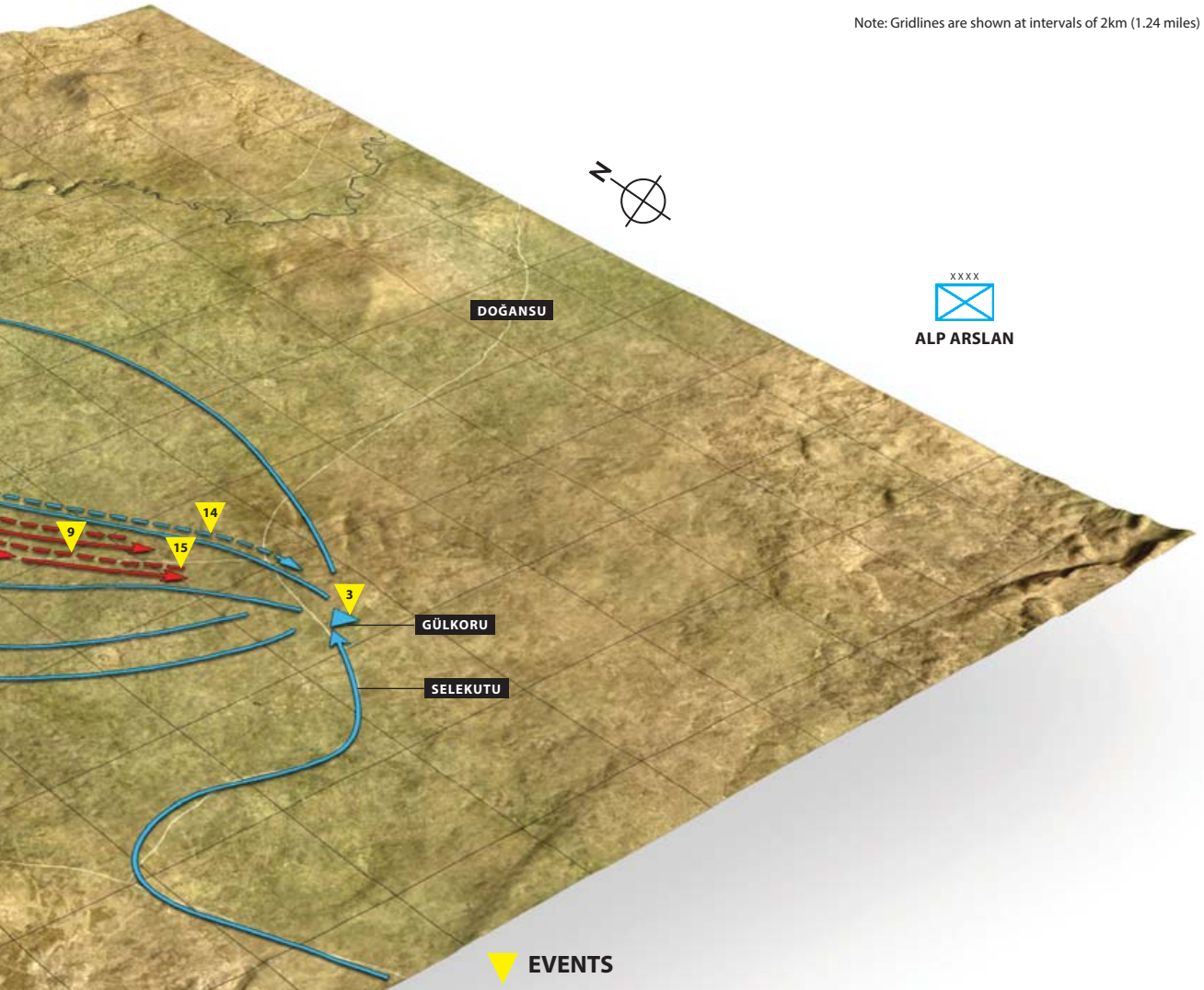
A soldier wearing a short-sleeved, full-length mail hauberk in a Byzantine wall painting of the Crucifixion made within a year or so of the battle of Manzikert. (*in situ* Sakli Kilise, Göreme, Cappadocia. Ahmet Soğut photograph)



THE FALL OF MANZIKERT AND THE ARRIVAL OF ALP ARSLAN, WEDNESDAY 24 TO MIDDAY THURSDAY 25 AUGUST

Following the rapid capitulation of the Turkish garrison in Manzikert, Alp Arslan acts cautiously, refusing the Byzantine Emperor's attempts to bring him to battle.





EVENTS

1 Romanos arrives outside Manzikert (Monday 22 or Tuesday 23 August) and establishes a fortified camp; he rides around the town inspecting its fortifications; siege machines are erected.

2 Armenian infantry take Manzikert town around sunset on Tuesday; Saljuq garrison in citadel refuses to surrender that night but agrees when threatened with another assault; the garrison emerges and spends the night under Byzantine guard; celebrations in the Byzantine camp; remaining population of Manzikert emerges from town early on Wednesday.

3 Hearing of attack on Manzikert, Alp Arslan moves north and makes camp north-west of Süphan Dağ, probably near Seleikutu or GÜLKÖRÜ.

4 Romanos prepares army for advance towards Ahlat, taking captured Saljuq garrison with them.

5 Byzantine foragers are attacked; Nikephoros Basilakes advises Romanos that the enemy are a small Turkish detachment from Ahlat.

6 Nikephoros Bryennios supports the foragers but is ambushed and retreats towards the Byzantine camp.

7 Romanos refuses to send support; meanwhile the army assembles for a religious service.

8 Romanos finally agrees to support Bryennios; he sends Nikephoros Basilakes who is captured and taken to Alp Arslan.

9 Survivors convince Romanos to send Bryennios again; reaching the foothills, he is almost surrounded and again withdraws.

10 Alp Arslan observes the Byzantine camp.

11 Romanos cancels the march to Ahlat; he sends messengers to recall Roussel and Trachaniotes, unaware that they are in flight towards Muş.

12 Romanos leads the army towards the Saljuqs.

13 Captured Saljuq garrison attempts to escape.

14 Saljuqs refuse to make contact.

15 As dusk approaches, Romanos orders the Byzantine army to withdraw.

16 Late Wednesday evening, a Saljuq detachment attacks Oghuz Turks in Byzantine service outside the camp; other attacks on the camp during the night.

17 Emperor Romanos decides to take the offensive on Friday.

18 Some Oghuz desert to the Saljuqs; Michael Attaleiates gets the remaining Oghuz to pledge loyalty.

19 Seljuk detachment unsuccessfully attempts to seize a riverbank 'opposite the Roman camp', Thursday morning.

20 Alp Arslan establishes a forward camp by a stream about a *farsakh* (5km) from the Byzantine camp.

‘Standing at the front line, he [Bryennios] fought with discharges of missiles and cavalry actions which were not effective, for they fought one another a few at a time ... many of the Romans were injured, and others also fell, for they [the enemy] are braver than the other Turks of whom we have had experience, dashing more boldly and opposing their assailants in hand to hand combat.’¹¹ It would take the Byzantines some time to realize they were not facing Türkmen but part of a more disciplined, committed and well trained Saljuq force. According to the Andalusian chronicler al-Turtushi’s *Siraj al-Muluk*, the latter were part of Alp Arslan’s vanguard.

Tensions between Romanos and Bryennios may have contributed to the Emperor’s initial refusal to send reinforcements, even reportedly accusing the *magistros* of cowardice. On the other hand, Romanos was busy getting the rest of the army ready for its intended march to Ahlat. After being harangued by their Emperor ‘in an unaccustomed way’ and with ‘words of extraordinary violence’, according to Attaleiates, the men attended a religious service, during which the chosen Bible reading for the day from the Gospel of John proved somewhat unfortunate. It included the lines: ‘If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you’ and ‘yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service’.¹² This again did nothing to improve morale.

Perhaps beginning to realize that a sizeable enemy force was nearby, Emperor Romanos sent messengers to recall his troops from around Ahlat, not knowing that they were already defeated and had fled. Romanos also decided that decisive action was needed to protect his foragers. So he sent the Armenian *dux* of Theodosiopolis, Nikephoros Basilakes, with a larger detachment of ‘local soldiers’ – probably Armenians – to do what the *magistros* Bryennios had failed to do. Unfortunately Basilakes then acted with what chroniclers on both sides and, in the event, Alp Arslan himself regarded as impetuous foolishness. Followed more cautiously by Bryennios, Basilakes charged in pursuit of the now retreating Turks, went too far ahead, fell into the almost inevitable ambush and was captured. His surviving troops fled pell-mell back to the Byzantine camp. Medics and the litters for injured men, which had long been a feature of Byzantine armies, were sent to collect the wounded, all bringing back news of a rout.

Sandug al-Turki is said to have been responsible for this new Saljuq success, and Basilakes was brought before the Sultan who berated him for making such a basic tactical error. By this time the Saljuq army had properly established camp in the foothills, dominating but unseen from the plateau, which stretched south and south-east of Manzikert. This plateau was clearly the area variously known as the Zaho, Zehve, Zahva, Rahve, Rahva or Rahwa. (In Persian *Rahwah* actually means ‘high ground’).

On the Emperor’s orders, the *magistros* Nikephoros Bryennios now hurried forward with the entire left wing but was too late to save the situation, learning the shocking truth from a dying man. After fighting off several attacks by a now formidable Saljuq force, making a number of counter-charges to avoid being surrounded, and himself having two arrows stuck in the armour on his back plus a spear thrust in his chest, Bryennios brought his troops back to the Byzantine camp. This time he found Romanos more sympathetic, being sent to the Imperial tent to have his wounds dressed.

¹¹ Hillenbrand, *op. cit.*, 231–232.

¹² From the Gospel of John, chapter 15, verse 20 and chapter 16, verse 2; King James translation.



Within a few kilometres of Manzikert, the plateau is broken up by numerous rocky outcrops, as here alongside the road to Ahlat from Manzikert. (Author's photograph)

The Muslim chronicler al-Bundari merely wrote that, 'the gerfalcons of both armies met in the contest. The cavalry rushed, the torrent flowed, the rearguard swept along from earth to sky... They [the Byzantines] were thrown back to their perch in their camp and, by what had been achieved in the wedding feast of Islam, they were removed to their [own] funeral ceremony.' The Byzantine chronicler Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger admitted that it had been a hard fight: 'a mass of Turks perished, but the Romans also suffered huge losses'. It was probably around this time that Muslim captives from the Manzikert garrison tried to escape while the Byzantine army's attention was focused elsewhere. Some succeeded but others were killed.

Finally the Emperor Romanos accepted the seriousness of the situation and that Alp Arslan's army had arrived. Apparently abandoning his march upon Ahlat, he reorganized the army for an advance against the enemy close at hand. The Byzantine army then moved in battle array across the plateau, with the enemy equally steadily falling back before them. Frustrated by the Saljuqs' refusal to allow contact – in which the Byzantines were confident they would win – but still taking care not to lose cohesion, nor fall into significant ambushes, Romanos pressed ahead until late afternoon. By then his army had reached the first foothills and he was faced with a dilemma. Further advance would not only take the large Byzantine army into broken ground where it would be difficult to maintain a unified front, but would also mean that any withdrawal to the fortified Byzantine camp would be in the dark. Frustrated but accepting the inevitable, Romanos halted, waited a while in case the enemy accepted his challenge, then took the army back to their encampment.

According to Rashid al-Din, some time during Wednesday, Alp Arslan climbed a small hill to inspect the Byzantine camp – there being several such outcrops within a few kilometres of the Byzantine position. The Sultan was apparently worried by the size of the enemy, but one of the senior Türkmen commanders, Malik Muhammad Danişmand suggested that they should turn back and not fight until Friday, using Thursday to prepare for battle and for possible martyrdom. This would presumably have been early in the day and have resulted in the Saljuq army's cautious refusal to be drawn into a full-scale confrontation. A different impression is given by Sadr al-Din al-Husayni, who recorded that when Alp Arslan saw the enemy's strongly fortified camp, he exclaimed: 'By God, they're as good as defeated, for digging a trench round themselves, in spite of their great number, is a sign of their cowardice and weakness.'



Made in 1009, this copy of the *Book of Fixed Stars* by Umar al-Sufi shows Perseus in typical Islamic costume and wielding a characteristic straight sword. (Ms. Marsh 144, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

Another story in Rashid al-Din is unlikely to contain any truth. It maintained that Alp Arslan and a small group of companions had actually been captured while out hunting before the main battle, but, being unrecognized, were released by the Byzantines as a gesture of goodwill during negotiations. Perhaps this happened to another Saljuq commander. What is certain is that the following night was a hard one for the Byzantines, being spent ‘in the greatest and most extreme agitation’ according to Ibn al-’Adim. Byzantine sources agree, reporting that during the evening a number of Oghuz mercenaries were attacked by Alp Arslan’s Turks while doing business with local traders and merchants outside the fortified camp. When they fled into the Byzantine camp, great confusion ensued because Oghuz and Türkmen looked so much alike to Greeks and Armenians.

As Attaleiates put it: ‘All jammed together one after another, they were chased into the entrance way, which caused tremendous confusion among the troops within... For there was no moon that night, and you could not tell who was being chased and who was doing the chasing. They did not, however, retreat but the whole night they kept up a din, riding round and about the Romans’ encampment, striking with arrows and vexations and buzzing around on every side and

terrifying them, so that all passed the night with open and sleepless eyes.’

Next day, Thursday, the Saljuq army seems to have advanced closer to the Byzantine camp, reaching a river, according to Ibn al-’Adim. The theory that Alp Arslan took his men close to the Murat River simply does not fit other information about this battle, so perhaps the Arab chronicler’s sources referred to a smaller stream, the steep-sided bed of which cuts across the plateau not far from the location of the fortified Byzantine encampment. Michael Attaleiates similarly mentioned this stream, claiming that the Turks tried to win control of both banks but were prevented from doing so by Byzantine infantry archers. There also seems to have been an attack upon the Byzantine camp, perhaps as part of a Saljuq attempt to take control of the entire plateau and deny the Byzantines access to sufficient drinking water.

Potentially just as dangerous was the desertion of some of the Byzantine army’s Oghuz mercenaries to the Saljuqs. Their number is unknown and it is clear that most of their comrades remained loyal after Michael Attaleiates, the future chronicler, persuaded them to swear oaths to that effect. Even so, doubts now hung over the reliability of these and other Turkish mercenaries. A small but interesting piece of additional information was provided by the southern Italian poet William of Apulia in his biography of the Norman ruler, Robert Guiscard. Perhaps having heard from Norman mercenaries who survived the battle of Manzikert, William reported that the Emperor Romanos distributed his wealth to the troops. But ‘the silver was gathered in by the mercenaries, who fled [perhaps the Oghuz]. The Greeks were obliged to spend the night without sleep.’

Attaleiates maintained that, following these desertions and losses, the number of Byzantine troops remaining with Emperor Romanos were fewer than those who had been sent to Ahlat. If that is correct, they would probably have been around 20,000 men, perhaps excluding the Oghuz and other Turkish mercenaries, which was not many more than those who followed Alp Arslan. If the infantry and the siege train were included, the real number may have been up to 30,000, though this still excluded the substantial number of administrative staff and camp followers. Amongst these Byzantine non-combatants were senior men, such as the judge Basil Maleses who would be captured at the end of the battle but then released. Another was Eustratios Choirospaktes who held the rank of a *protonotarios* or high-ranking imperial clerk.

The Saljuqs, of course, were convinced that they faced a far greater number. Some Muslim chroniclers gave the impossible figure of 600,000, and even Ibn al-Jawzi maintained that Romanos ‘had with him 35,000 Franks and 35,000... [gap in text] with 200 generals and commanders; each of them having between 2,500 horsemen. He [also] had with him 15,000 Ghuzz [Oghuz] who were [living] beyond Constantinople; and 100,000 sappers and diggers and 100,000 siege engineers.’ Ibn al-Jawzi’s figures are nevertheless interesting in making clear that the proportion of second-line personnel far exceeded that of the fighting men.

The most likely number for Alp Arslan’s army as it readied itself for battle outside Manzikert is 15,000 to 20,000 front-line cavalry. Yet Ibn al-Qalanisi maintains there were 40,000 ‘from amongst the Turks and other contingents’ – this latter distinction perhaps being more significant than the figure itself. Sibt al-Jawzi was more specific, noting, ‘He who mentioned that there were 4,000 *mamluks* with the sultan was more correct, because of what we have mentioned about the [other] troops having dispersed.’

During Thursday, Alp Arslan moved his army forward and, in the words of al-Bundari, ‘camped by the river [probably the aforementioned stream], accompanied by 15,000 horsemen from amongst the Turkish fighters who knew nothing but killing and subjugation’. Meanwhile the Emperor Romanos found himself being given conflicting advice. Some officers urged an immediate attack while the wounded *magistros* Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder continued to urge caution, awaiting the arrival of those troops recalled from Ahlat who would, of course, never arrive.

On Thursday there was apparently an exchange of letters ‘about making a peace treaty’ according to al-Husayni. Ibn al-Azraq agrees, ‘letters began to go back and forth between the two of them’, while Bar Hebraeus stated: ‘because the Turks were few in number the Sultan ‘Alb ‘Arslan was afraid, and he sent an envoy to [Romanos] Diogenes, a certain noble whose name was Sawtakin [the eunuch Sav-Tekin], that they might make peace and say to each other, “we will go back each to his own country”’.¹³ The seriousness with which the Saljuq Sultan approached these negotiations is surely reflected in the fact that he sent an embassy to the Emperor, led by a senior judge from the ‘Abbasid Caliphal court in Baghdad. His name was Ibn al-Muhallaban but it is not known how long this dignitary had been with Alp Arslan’s army.

Ibn al-Muhallaban already had experience of direct negotiations with the Byzantine Emperor who, it was said, held him in high regard. Al-Muhallaban’s team now arrived in the Byzantine camp late on Thursday, and were shocked

13 Bar Hebraeus (tr. Budge, E.A.W.), *The Chronology of Gregory Abu'l-Faraj... commonly known as Bar Hebraeus* (London, 1932) 220.







**EMPEROR ROMANOS IV HUMILIATES A SALJUQ PEACE DELEGATION, LATE EVENING,
THURSDAY 25 AUGUST 1071 (PP. 66–67)**

Sultan Alp Arslan sent a negotiating delegation to the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV the day after the brief Byzantine siege of the fortified town of Manzikert had come to a successful conclusion. It was led by Ibn al-Muhalban, a senior jurist or Islamic legal scholar, who had been sent by the 'Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad to support Alp Arslan, probably in anticipation of a campaign against the rival Fatimid Caliphate rather than in a campaign against the Byzantine Empire. Similarly, the Sultan still did not see the Byzantine Emperor as his most important adversary - that being the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt and Syria. Furthermore, Alp Arslan feared that his seriously outnumbered army would be defeated in a full-scale battle. In contrast, Romanos (1) was supremely confident. Despite having met Ibn al-Muhalban (2)

before and apparently treating him with respect on that occasion, the Emperor now insisted that the old man performed the full *proskynesis*. This entailed kissing the ground in front of the Emperor's throne, which was a serious humiliation for the 'Abbasid Caliph's representative. Furthermore, the Emperor also made virtually impossible conditions which would have seriously humiliated the Sultan. The splendour of Byzantine display during this meeting was later recalled by Sadr al-Din al-Husayni, writing early in the 13th century. With some exaggeration he claimed that Romanos sat a golden throne, above which was a golden cross set with priceless jewels, while before him was a host of monks and priests reciting the Gospel.



As the Byzantine army pursued the steadily withdrawing Saljuqs they entered increasingly broken, rock-strewn terrain, as here, 3km along the road to Agri. (Author's photograph)

by the churlish manner in which they were received. The aged ambassador was even forced to make the *proskynesis*, or full bow to the earth in front of the Emperor, which was a calculated humiliation for such a senior representative of the 'Abbasid Caliph. By then, according to Michael Attaleiates, the Emperor had already decided to accept those arguing for a military solution, rejecting peace proposals 'as making a mockery of the affair and a deception rather than an expedient solution'.

To add insult to injury, Romanos laid down impossible conditions, insisting that the Sultan withdraw to a greater distance, permitting Byzantine troops to take over and fortify the Saljuq camp. He similarly refused to start real peace talks, saying: 'I will agree to that opinion [in Arabic ra'y] [only when I am] in [the Iranian city of] al-Rayy.' He then asked the ambassador which was best in winter, Isfahan or Hamadan, adding that he had been informed Hamadan would be cold. According to Ibn al-Azraq, Ibn al-Muhallaban agreed that Isfahan would be more pleasant, whereupon Romanos announced; "As for us, we will winter in Isfahan and the riding animals will be in Hamadhan." Ibn al-Muhallaban replied, "As for the riding animals, it is true that they will winter in Hamadhan. As for you, I do not know."

According to al-Husayni:

I heard from Khwaja Imam Musharraf al-Shirazi ... while we were going down to Khwarazm. He said; 'I heard from my elders that when the troops of the sultan Alp Arslan and the troops of Byzantium were fighting each other, the king of Byzantium sent a messenger to the sultan who said to him; "I have come to you accompanied by troops that you cannot resist. If you become subservient to me, I will give you from the lands that which will be sufficient for you... If you do not do that, I have with me in the way of troops three hundred thousand cavalry and infantry. I have fourteen thousand carts on which are coffers of money and weapons. Not a single one of the Muslim troops can resist me and none of their cities and citadels will remain shut in my face." When the sultan heard this message, the glory of Islam overcame him and the pride of kingship stirred in his breast. He said to the envoy: "Tell your master: It is not you who have sought me out, but it is God... Some of your troops will be killed by me; others will be my captives. All your treasures will be in my possession and [become] my property."

The die was cast. Romanos had concluded that Alp Arslan was afraid because he had too few men and was therefore trying to delay matters until reinforcements arrived. If that had been correct, then the Byzantine decision to attack as soon as they felt ready would have been correct, offering the real possibility of crushing the Saljuq army. Furthermore, the morale of the Byzantine army would probably decline with further delay. So Romanos decided to prepare for a battle the following day, Friday, having realized that the missing troops from Ahlat would not appear. Nevertheless the Byzantine chronicler Michael Attaleiates was surely wrong in stating, 'While the Turks were working out the terms of peace among themselves, the emperor, sounding the battle cry, inexplicably decided on battle.' By now both sides had probably accepted that a fight was inevitable.

The only chronicler to hint that Nizam al-Mulk was with Alp Arslan's army was Sadr al-Din al-Husayni who stated that, after these negotiations had failed, the *wazir* was sent back to Hamadan 'in order to defend Iraq [then meaning western Persia and Iraq], Khurasan and Mazandaran from malcontents and evildoers'. Meanwhile the arrogance of the Byzantine Emperor and his brutal rebuff of Alp Arslan's negotiator reportedly enraged the Saljuq army. Nevertheless, Alp Arslan was far from confident of the outcome and almost all the Islamic sources emphasize his pessimism before the battle. Al-Husayni specifically stated that the Sultan was alarmed: 'His *imam* and *faqih* [personal religious guide], Abu Nasr Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Bukhari al-Hanafi, said to him: "You are fighting for God's religion. I hope that Almighty God will have written this victory in your name. Meet them [the Byzantines] on Friday at the hour when the preachers will be on the pulpits [during the main congregational service] praying for victory for the warriors of the faith against the infidels and the prayer will be answered."'

Until then, both armies spent the moonless night of Thursday–Friday readying themselves for battle. Confidence, it is generally agreed, was higher on the Christian side, as confirmed by al-Turtushi: 'So the Muslims passed the night of Friday [i.e. Thursday–Friday] whilst the Byzantines were in a number which nobody except He who had created them could enumerate, and the Muslims had nothing with them except gnawing hunger. The Muslims remained silent with fear about what had befallen them.'

On the morning of Friday 26 August 1071 both sides prayed and prepared, crosses and icons being paraded before the Byzantine troops. Although Matthew of Edessa gets several events muddled up, his description of these final preparations was probably close to the mark: 'In the morning hours the battle trumpet was sounded, and heralds went forth and proclaimed the wishes of the emperor [Romanos] Diogenes. He promised honours, high positions, and jurisdiction over the towns and districts to all those who would courageously fight against the Persian forces.' The chronicler Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger seems to be alone in maintaining that the Saljuqs were the first to move: 'The emperor, seeing that the Turks were attacking, also ordered the troops out to fight and ranged them in battle order in front of the camp. The right wing was commanded by [Theodore] Alyates, a Cappadocian and close friend of the Emperor, the left wing by Bryennios, and the centre by the Emperor himself. The rearguard had been entrusted to the son of the Caesar, the *proedrus* Andronicus [Dukas], the commander of the foreign troops and of those of the *archons* [aristocracy].'

In fact the Imperial army was arrayed ahead of its fortified camp and prepared to advance in battle formations. On the morning of Friday 26 August, it prepared to advance against the Turks. The left under the 'dux of the west', Nikephoros Bryennios, included the western *tagmata* which he had commanded for some years. The right under Theodore Alyates consisted of the Cappadocians and probably most of the other Anatolian units. It would have been traditional for the Oghuz, Pechenegs and other Turkish auxiliaries and mercenaries to be on the flanks – perhaps with more emphasis on the traditionally 'offensive' right rather than the 'defensive' left. Others would have been with the rearguard, though no specific mention was made of these troops.

In the centre the Emperor Romanos IV commanded the *scholai* and most of the remaining palace or guard units, plus the best-equipped Armenian infantry and probably most of the remaining Byzantine heavy cavalry. Most of the Byzantine archers had either been sent on the disastrous expedition to Ahlat, or stayed back to defend the Byzantine camp. Unfortunately Matthew of Edessa's statement that the Emperor 'appointed as commanders of his troops Khatap and Vasilak, Armenian nobles who were brave and were regarded as great warriors' fails to identify these men in greater detail.

Much criticism has been directed at the Emperor's decision to place Andronikos Dukas in charge of the rearguard, which apparently included the personal or quasi-feudal military retinues of the great Byzantine landowners. Whether it is correct to believe that Andronikos Dukas could do least harm if he commanded this rearguard is doubtful. But whether or not the command structure was an error, the fact that the rearguard lagged some way behind once the Byzantine advance began was within accepted Byzantine tactics. Its role was to serve as a reserve, being able to support the other formations if needed, and to stop the enemy from attacking these formations from the rear. In this it would play its part correctly until the closing stages of the battle.

It was still normal for Byzantine emperors to make themselves distinctive and highly visible in warfare, perhaps donning armour only if they expected to enter combat personally – as Romanos would do. There is no record of what Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes wore during the battle of Manzikert, but more is known about the Emperor Romanos III Argyros in battle near Aleppo some 40 years earlier. He was captured by the Fatimids and his clothing was described in detail by a Muslim chronicler. It consisted of a felt mantle garnished with pearls on the hems, sleeves and around the neck, while on the Emperor's back and chest were crosses in gold, encrusted with rubies.

Michael Attaleiates was surely wrong in stating: 'When the report reached the enemy, it astounded them. In the meantime, however, they armed themselves and drove the useless multitude ahead of them in retreat, while in the rear they gave the appearance of battle array.' Here Muslim and Armenian chroniclers are almost certainly more reliable, indicating that the Muslim



Scenes of the Passion of Christ on a silver-gilt Georgian icon, made between 1050 and 1100. (Georgian State Art Museum, V-939.G-76-A, Tblisi)

Looking northwards from rising broken ground about 15km along the Ahlat road. (Author's photograph)



troops rose on Friday morning, readied themselves for combat and then adopted their battle array. This envisaged a prolonged withdrawal at the start of the battle, and here I can do no better than to quote John Haldon's excellent summation: 'At some distance from the Roman lines, but well in advance of this rougher land, Arslan had drawn up his own, less numerous force in a crescent formation, although he was himself not among the main body of troops, preferring to observe events from the higher ground to the rear. The Seljuk army was, in effect, divided up into a centre and two wings, but in traditional nomadic fashion these divisions in turn consisted of several smaller groupings which could, where needed, act independently.'¹⁴

The Andalusian chronicler al-Turtushi maintained that Alp Arslan had his troops counted that morning, finding that they included only 12,000 Turks. He then held counsel with his leaders to decide how best to face the more numerous Byzantine hosts. Then 'they made peace with each other, swore oaths to each other and showed sincere intentions towards Islam and its people. Then they made preparations for battle and they said to Alp Arslan: "We will invoke the name of God Most High and we will attack the people [the enemy]."' According to Bryennios, command in the fighting itself was given to his chief of staff, the eunuch 'Taranges' – namely the *sarhang* Sav-Tekin. 'This man divided his army into several groups, set traps and organized ambushes, and ordered his men to surround the Byzantines and to riddle them with arrows.' While most sources indicated that the Saljuq army was arrayed in three major divisions, al-Bundari insisted that there were four, 'with each division... being in an ambush'. Alp Arslan then checked to see that each ambush was firm and that hidden troops were indeed out of sight of the enemy.

Al-Turtushi's account is in his *Siraj al-Muluk*, a book of advice for rulers, which included several battles of tactical interest. Though written in Fatimid Egypt around 1122, the author had contact with scholars in Saljuq Baghdad and thus presumably drew upon the accounts of those who took part in the battle or knew men who had done so. Amongst several interesting bits of information were Alp Arslan's decision to hold back through the day, counter-attacking only at dusk, his focus on capturing the Byzantine Emperor, the role of his own elite troops and the subsequent humiliation of Emperor Romanos.

¹⁴ Haldon, J., *The Byzantine Wars*, op. cit., 122.

Muslim sources naturally emphasize Alp Arslan's pious and heroic speeches during the battle. Whether these can in any sense be taken literally is doubtful, though they reflect the attitudes of the time. They also confirm that the steady Saljuq withdrawal was part of a prepared plan that demanded considerable command and control. The fact that this succeeded while both armies moved for several kilometres across increasingly rocky and eventually rising ground, says a lot for the cohesion of both sides. The battlefield then reached rolling but still bare hills, broken up by shallow gullies and stream beds.

The biggest question concerns the location of the initial Saljuq camp in the foothills and the direction along which the Saljuqs withdrew during Friday. It might have been southwards towards Ahlat or south-eastwards towards the modern village of Gülköru. Both directions would have offered Alp Arslan suitable locations for a commanding overview of the battlefield while providing ample cover for ambushes. Most historians have preferred the southerly route, whereas the Turkish military historian Feridun Dirimtekin prefers the south-easterly. This would also have offered an easier escape route in case the Saljuqs were defeated. The road to Ahlat would surely have resulted in the Sultan and his army being trapped in that strong citadel.

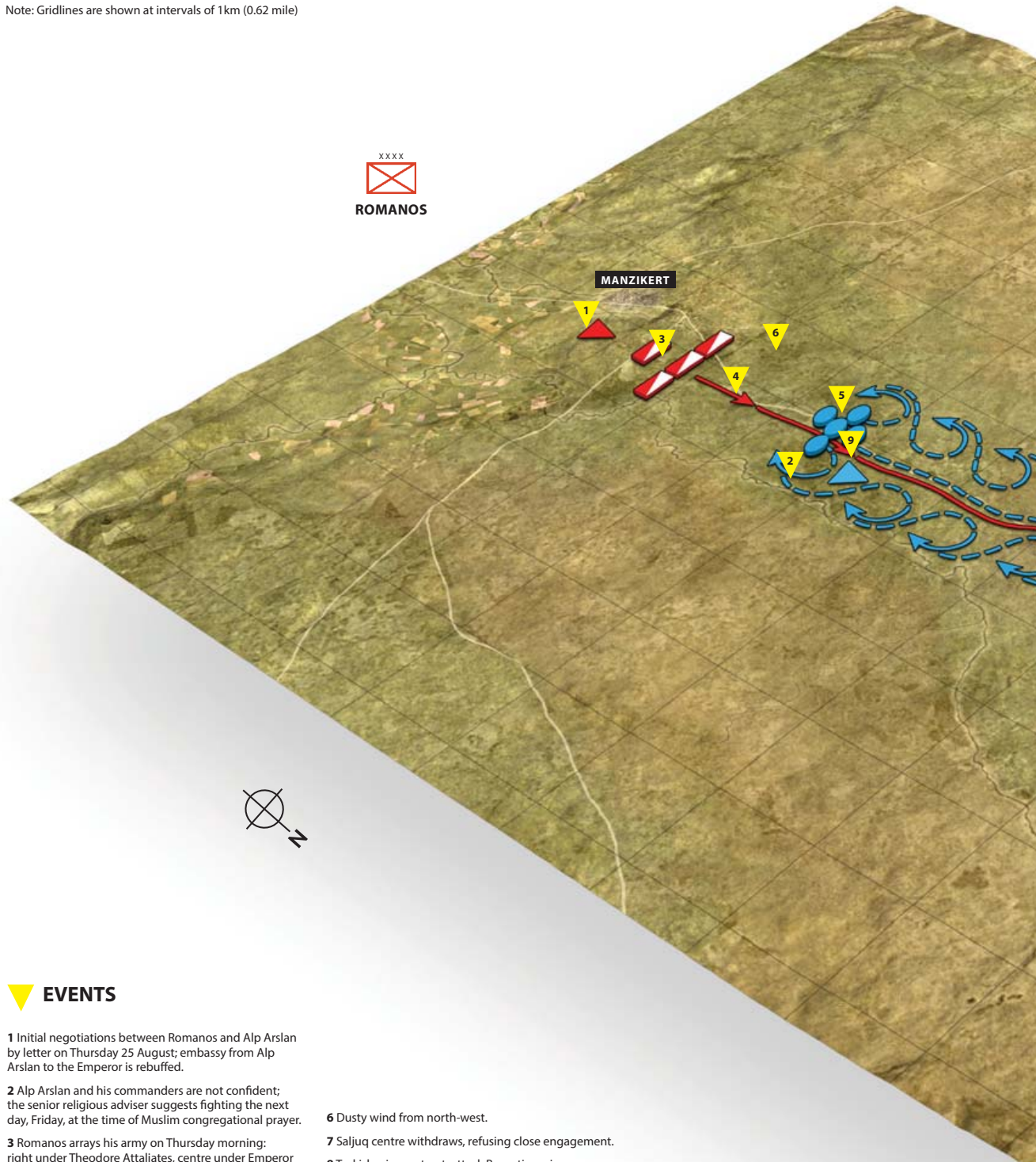
After completing their array, the Byzantines advanced, probably at mid-morning of Friday. Their tactics were those of Byzantine tradition during this period, seeking to close with the enemy to use their superiority in armoured close combat before suffering too much from enemy archery. This meant maintaining a steady pace and close cavalry formations.

One interesting feature, which is mentioned by al-Husayni, concerns the 'dusty wind ... which blinded the eyes of the Muslims, and the sultan's army almost took flight'. A northerly wind would be common at that time of year and the dust was presumably stirred up as large cavalry formations trotted over dry ground. It would also have been more of a problem for the steadily withdrawing Saljuq army. As Alp Arslan's centre fell back, the wings did so more slowly and with more frequent ambushes and wheeling around to harass the advancing Byzantines with close-range archery. As the day progressed, it was the Byzantine army that began to lose cohesion, its lines becoming ragged, its centre pushing forward while its wings were slowed by persistent enemy harassment.

Muslim chroniclers tended to revert to poetry and piety in describing this phase of the battle whereas the Byzantine sources were more factual. Nikephos Bryennios the Younger, for example, explained how: 'The Byzantines, seeing their cavalry under attack, were obliged to follow it, which they did, while the enemy pretended to flee. But, falling victim to the traps and ambushes, they suffered great losses. While the emperor, determined to risk all, was advancing slowly, expecting to encounter the Turkish host, engage them in close combat, and thus bring matters to a head, the Turks scattered in all directions.' Of course the Saljuqs only seemed to be scattering; in reality they doggedly followed their prearranged plan.

By mid-afternoon the Byzantine centre had reached and overrun a Saljuq camp and was still pushing ahead. This camp is mentioned only by Christian sources and is likely to have been the Muslims' forward command position rather than their main camp in the foothills. Nevertheless the Byzantines soon reached broken and rising ground, which must have made the Emperor's control over his increasingly separated left and right wings more difficult. Furthermore, none of the main Byzantine formations had been able to make

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1 km (0.62 mile)



EVENTS

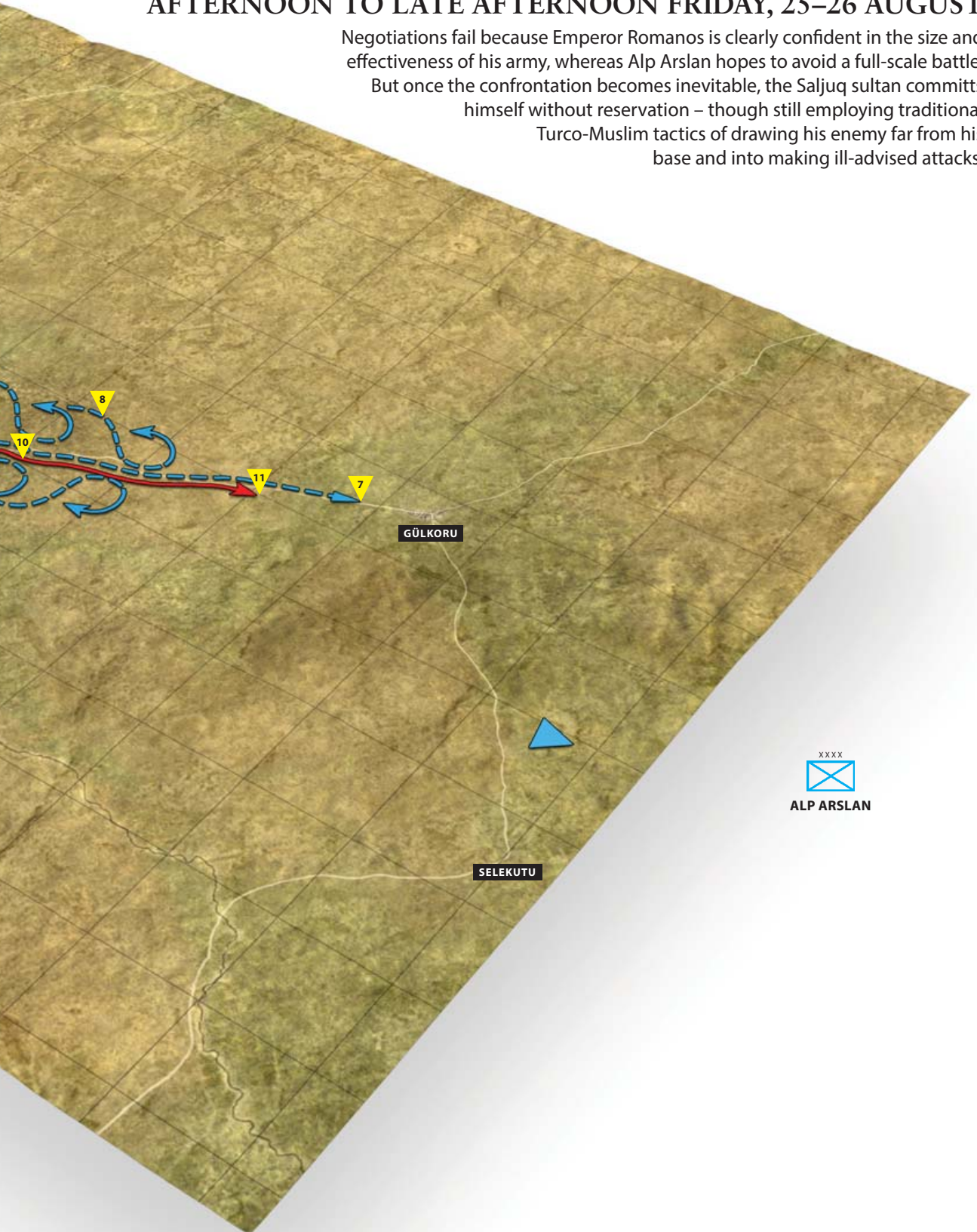
- 1 Initial negotiations between Romanos and Alp Arslan by letter on Thursday 25 August; embassy from Alp Arslan to the Emperor is rebuffed.
- 2 Alp Arslan and his commanders are not confident; the senior religious adviser suggests fighting the next day, Friday, at the time of Muslim congregational prayer.
- 3 Romanos arrays his army on Thursday morning: right under Theodore Attaliates, centre under Emperor Romanos, left under Nikephoros Bryennios, rear under Andronikos Dukas.
- 4 Byzantine army advances, trying to close with the enemy.
- 5 Alp Arslan arranged his forces in four or five divisions: Alp Arslan with the centre, the *sarhang* Sav-Tekin in command of a 'trap' probably consisting of the rearguard.

- 6 Dusty wind from north-west.
- 7 Saljuq centre withdraws, refusing close engagement.
- 8 Turkish wings retreat, attack Byzantine wings, repeating this while generally withdrawing.
- 9 Byzantine centre overruns Saljuq camp or command position by mid-afternoon.
- 10 Byzantine line grows ragged as wings are slowed by Saljuq attacks and ambushes.
- 11 The Emperor's division reaches rougher terrain after mid-afternoon, thus entering Alp Arslan's 'trap'.

NEGOTIATIONS AND THE BYZANTINE ATTACK, THURSDAY AFTERNOON TO LATE AFTERNOON FRIDAY, 25–26 AUGUST

Negotiations fail because Emperor Romanos is clearly confident in the size and effectiveness of his army, whereas Alp Arslan hopes to avoid a full-scale battle.

But once the confrontation becomes inevitable, the Saljuq sultan commits himself without reservation – though still employing traditional Turco-Muslim tactics of drawing his enemy far from his base and into making ill-advised attacks.





David returning with Goliath's head on a spear, in a Byzantine psalter made less than 20 years after the battle of Manzikert. (Vatopedi Monastery Library, Cod. 761, f.13v, Mount Athos)

effective contact with its enemies, yet continued to suffer from enemy archery. This must have been wounding if not killing many horses, if not so many of the armoured men. It seemed that each time they retaliated by charging the enemy, they fell into yet another ambush and occasionally some Turks were able to get behind some Byzantines.

Emperor Romanos now reached the area where Alp Arslan had reportedly planned his main counter-attack. This claim by the Muslim chroniclers might, of course, have been crediting the Sultan with more foresight than was really the case. The timing is also somewhat unclear, for Muslim accounts generally agree that Alp Arslan's counter-stroke was delivered at the time when the main congregational Friday prayers would be ending and Muslim preachers would be delivering their sermons from the *minbars* or pulpits. Christian sources indicate that, in reality, it was rather later as the afternoon drew towards a close – perhaps around four o'clock.

Before this, however, Emperor Romanos ordered a halt. As had happened two days earlier, he realized that he was far from his fortified camp, which was itself vulnerable to attack. The gaps between his centre and wings were larger than they should be, his troops were undoubtedly getting tired, thirsty and perhaps short of supplies as well as frustrated and perhaps demoralized. It seems unlikely that 'twilight took him by surprise' but evening would soon arrive – as it does quite suddenly in this part of the world. So the Emperor reluctantly ordered another withdrawal.

On the other side, according to al-Husayni, Alp Arslan was praying that the wind would change and the dust would stop. The dust did indeed stop, almost certainly because the armies had done so. Wind directions can also change in the cool of evening, but al-Husayni was probably stretching a point when he claimed that the dust now became a problem for the infidels. Nevertheless the armies did change direction as Emperor Romanos ordered a general but controlled retreat, apparently starting with the central division.

As was normal practice, this was signalled by a reversal of the Imperial standards or, in the words of Michael Attaleiates, 'He turned round the Imperial standard, ordering a return.' Unfortunately for the Byzantine army, this signal was misinterpreted by some of the divisions farthest away who apparently thought that the centre, under the Emperor, had been defeated. This not surprisingly led to confusion, especially on the right wing where many thought that Romanos himself had fallen.

It was the moment that Alp Arslan had been awaiting. There is no reason to doubt that he was dressed in white, as some Muslim accounts maintain. Meanwhile, he put aside the bow and a quiver of three arrows, which he carried as much as a traditional mark of Türkmen leadership than as weapons. By taking up a sword and mace Alp Arslan similarly indicated that he was entering close combat – and that the rest of his army should do

likewise. Even the Christian chronicler included these details, though placing a shield and spear rather than a sword and mace in the Sultan's hands. By knotting his horse's tail Alp Arslan was carrying out another action, which had, for centuries, been both symbolic and practical in Turkish warfare. It again indicated that he would enter the *mêlée* and wanted to make it harder for opponents to disturb his horse by grabbing hold of its tail. Sibt al-Jawzi and Imad al-Din both add that the Sultan now put on his helmet and coif, thus becoming a fully armoured but otherwise ordinary cavalryman.

These symbolic actions were apparently followed by prayer and a speech, which, though recorded in several versions of flowery prose by chroniclers, was probably more pungent and direct at the time: 'We are with a depleted number of men. I want to throw myself on them [the Byzantines] at this hour when prayers are being said for us and for the Muslims on the pulpits. Either I will achieve that goal or I will go as a martyr to Paradise. He amongst you who wants to follow me, let him follow me, and he who wants to leave, let him leave my company. Here is not a sultan commanding, nor an army being commanded, for today I am only one of you and a *ghazi* with you. He who follows me and gives himself to God Most High, he will gain Paradise and booty. He who goes away, the Fire [of Hell] and ignominy are obligatory for him.' None, it is said, chose to leave.

Seeing what was happening on the Byzantine right wing and perhaps being informed by scouts that the enemy's rearguard was farther away than it should have been, and apparently withdrawing more rapidly than it should, Alp Arslan launched his counter-attack. Michael Attaleiates, who was still in the Byzantine camp at this time, reported: 'Those of the enemy who were standing on ridges saw the sudden misfortune of the Romans, reported the fact to the sultan... He returned straightway and battle all at once beat against the emperor.' The Muslim sources insist that evening was now drawing on, Sibt al-Jawzi declaring: 'They shouted with one voice at which the mountains trembled, and they pronounced the *takbir* [*Allahu Akbar*, 'God is Most Powerful']. They went into the centre of the Byzantines and fought them.'

Although Alp Arslan's centre attacked the Byzantine centre, it was the Byzantine right that crumbled first, enabling Saljuq troops to get between it and the Byzantine rearguard. According to Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger, the right was routed. As its men fled towards the safety of the camp, the rearguard, instead of coming back to assist, reportedly speeded up its own withdrawal. This was later interpreted by Michael Attaleiates, and by most modern historians, as treachery by Andronikos Dukas. For Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger, it was this that enabled the Turks to 'surround the emperor and assail him on all sides'.

Betrayal or not, the failure of the Byzantine rearguard to fulfil its proper role by protecting the withdrawal led to infectious panic in the other divisions. For Attaleiates, Romanos now became the doomed hero: 'and so the emperor, seeing the inexplicable flight from battle, stood with those around him, recalling his men from flight in the usual way. But no one obeyed him.' In fact some did. Nor were they alone in trying to prevent disaster.

Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder, in command of the left wing, attempted to support the centre but found his division being attacked from the rear, so he too was forced to retreat, eventually breaking up in flight. Some have credited Sav-Tekin with this success, maintaining that he had been in







THE EMPEROR ROMANOS IV MAKES HIS FINAL STAND, SUNSET, FRIDAY 26 AUGUST 1071 (PP. 78–79)

The final stage of the battle of Manzikert saw the Byzantine army in disarray, its wings collapsing and in retreat towards its strongly fortified encampment outside the recently captured town and citadel of Manzikert. Some Byzantine units found that Saljuq forces were already between them and the hoped-for security of their camp. Worse still, the Byzantine reserve formation did not move forward to support the crumbling forward formations. This not surprisingly led to rapidly spreading panic. However, the Emperor Romanos (1) attempted the rally the Byzantine centre, which he himself commanded, hoping to launch a counter-attack and thus enable the rest of his army to reach safety. His efforts failed and so, with his remaining bodyguard (2) and those other troops who remained with him (3), Romanos made a final stand on one of the many rocky outcrops or small hillocks which dot the

battlefield of Manzikert. Those who remained with the Emperor included many Armenian infantry (4), probably because, as foot soldiers, they could not escape Alp Arslan's entirely mounted army. In fact the most numerous Byzantine casualties were suffered by the Emperor's personal troops and these Armenian foot soldiers. There are several different versions of these final moments of the struggle. Most agree that Romanos IV was eventually taken captive by a low-ranking *ghulam* or supposedly 'slave soldier' (5). This unnamed man seems to have been of Byzantine origin, having probably been recruited as a prisoner of war during an earlier campaign. One version of this story maintains that the Emperor was finally found sheltering beneath a wagon (6), or that he was not identified and seized until the fighting had moved on towards Manzikert.



Foothills of the massif culminating in the Süphan Dağ. It was probably near here that Alp Arslan ordered his main counter-attack. (Author's photograph)

command of a Saljuq reserve that lay hidden behind the main army.¹⁵ Aristakes Lastivertc'i, though far from favourable to the Byzantine cause, was at pains to highlight the loyalty of those Armenians who fought by the Emperor's side in the central division, despite Romanos' prejudice against them: 'Yet, when he saw them with dedication, when he saw the boldness of those braves who did not fear the able Persian archers, but rather were stoutly resisting and not turning tail and did not abandon the king as many had, no, instead they risked death so that after death they would leave a good name of loyal bravery, then did he display great affection for them and promised them unheard of rewards.'¹⁶ Writing a short time after the event, Aristakes also maintained that it was only in this desperate situation that Emperor Romanos 'arose and dressed and armed himself like a warrior', perhaps basing his assertion on the recollections of surviving Armenian soldiers who had been with the Emperor at the time.

Sibt al-Jawzi agreed that Emperor Romanos had not been mounted on his horse when the crisis erupted, not believing that the Saljuqs could advance against him. Whatever the truth of the matter, Romanos Diogenes and those who remained with him now made a stand, hoping to stem the Saljuq attack and enable the army to regroup or escape. Soon surrounded, they fought on and, in the words of Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger, 'The emperor, abandoned and completely cut off from help, unsheathed his sword and charged at his enemies, killing many of them and putting others to flight.' Michael Attaleiates agreed: 'Ordering those around him not to give in or soften, he [the emperor] defended himself vigorously for a long time.' Matthew of Edessa saw matters in a different way: 'When the emperor learned of this [the retreat of the rearguard], he realized the treachery of his own Romans.' Al-Turtushi was told by his sources, 'They began shouting in the language of Byzantium: "The king has been killed! The king has been killed!" ... and they scattered and were totally torn to pieces.' Al-Bundari was more detached in his account: 'One group did not stand firm for fighting and did not remain steadfast. Another group did stand firm and was killed [or] in captivity.'

¹⁵ Başan, G., *The Great Seljuqs, A History* (London, 2010) 80.

¹⁶ Aristakes Lastivertc'i, op. cit., 168–69.

A ceramic plate from Nishapur made in the 10th or early 11th century, decorated with images of cavalry and infantry. (Museum of Oriental Art, no. 2629-3558, Rome. Author's photograph)



Being present in the fortified Byzantine camp, Michael Attaleiates offered a personal account of the unfolding disaster: ‘Meanwhile, as the others in their flight flooded over the entrenchment outside, there was a mixed cry from all and disorderly flight and no informed statement was made. Some said that the emperor had vigorously stood in array with the men remaining with him and had routed the barbarians; others announced his slaughter or capture... As to whether I, confronting those who fled, gave a good account of myself against many, urging the reversal of defeat, let others say... and finally the Turks surrounded us on all sides. Then each entrusted his salvation to flight with as much impetus, haste or strength as he had.’¹⁷

There are various versions of how the Emperor Romanos IV was eventually captured but several facts emerge clearly. Romanos was wounded in his hand – by a sword according to Michael Attaleiates – and his horse fell, wounded by an arrow, ‘dragging its rider down with it’ according to Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger. Romanos may either have lain amongst the wounded all night on the battlefield before being captured, or have been amongst other wounded captives who spent the night tied to his captor’s tent pole. Michael Attaleiates added that the captured Romanos ‘slept on the ground, dishonourably and painfully’. Bar Hebraeus shows how the best medieval chroniclers, like modern historians, tried to compare different sources: ‘Now I have found this history in two manuscripts, Arabic and Persian. But the blessed Mar Michael wrote, “The son of the sister of the Sultan captured the king, and another Turk came and killed the Sultan’s nephew, and took the king, so that the merit of the capture might be his.”’ However, he rejected this story as unbelievable.

The Islamic chroniclers focus on the fact that the Emperor was actually captured by a lowly soldier, thus demonstrating how Islam humbles the proud. The lowly status of the Emperor’s captor was certainly emphasized by al-Bundari and Ibn al-’Adim: ‘Amongst the amazing things that were related about the king being taken prisoner was that Sa’d al-Dawla Gawhara’in had a *mamluk* [*ghulam*] whom he gave to Nizam al-Mulk [the *wazir*] as a present. He [Nizam al-Mulk] sent him back and did not look at him.’

¹⁷ Hillenbrand, op. cit., 234–235.

There are again several versions, though they differ only in minor details and can be assembled into a reasonably cohesive whole. Seemingly a horse belonging to one of the *ghulams* in Alp Arslan's division strayed during the chaotic aftermath of the fighting. This man followed the animal and found another horse with an ornamented bridle and a saddle of gold that obviously belonged to someone senior. Next to this horse was a man with a gilded helmet and armour. When the *ghulam* attacked him, the wounded man said: 'I am Caesar of the Rum. Do not kill me for the slaying of kings is an ill omen.' Other versions maintain that ten young boys from amongst the wounded man's servants urged the *ghulam* to put down his weapon because he had captured the Byzantine Emperor. Nishapuri, in his *Saljuqnama* epic verse history of the Saljuqs, claimed that the *ghulam* was himself of Greek origin and therefore recognized his captive, while Rashid al-Din added that Romanos was found hiding under a cart. Meanwhile, most agree that Romanos was not taken before the Sultan until the following day.

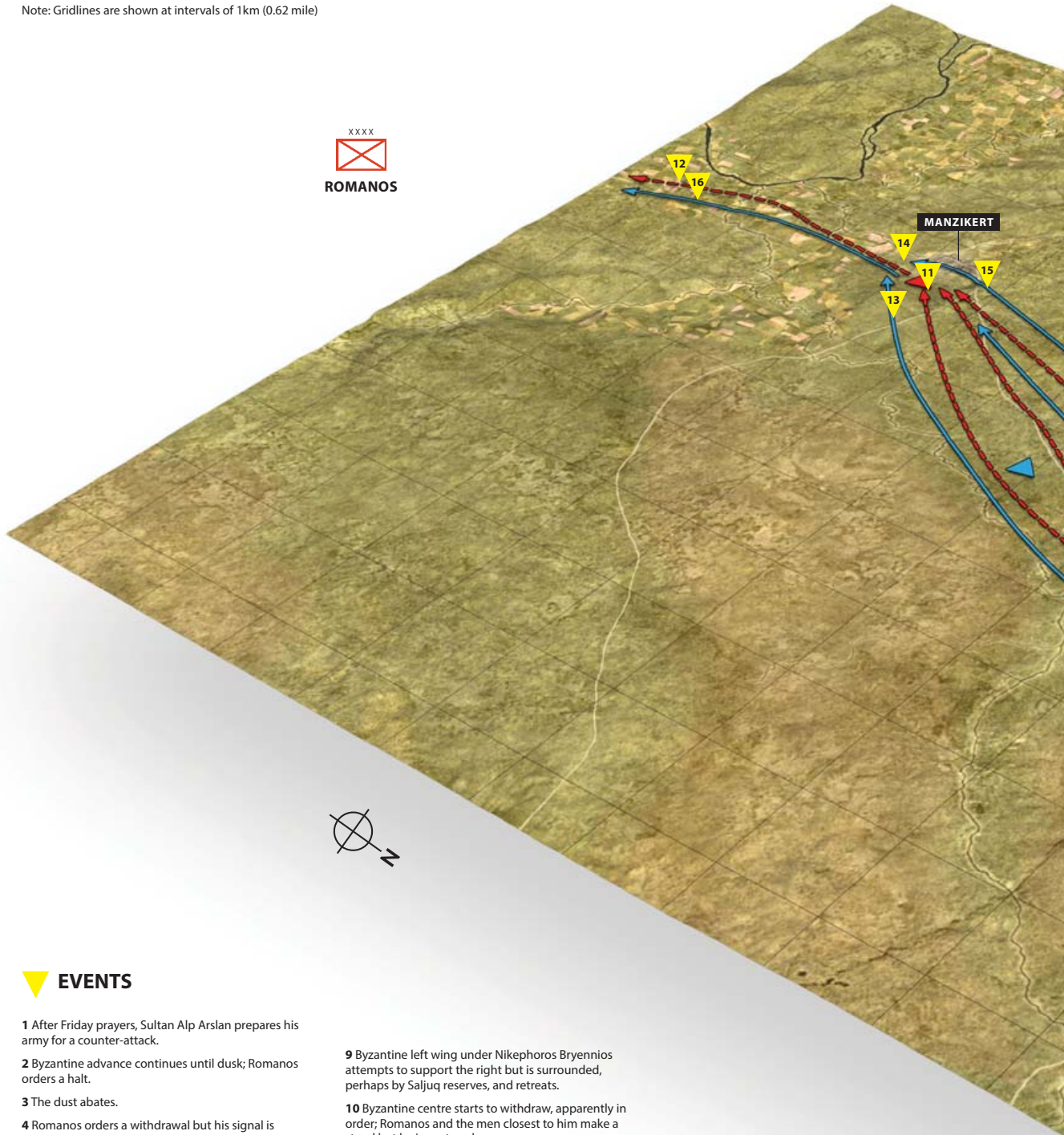
Elsewhere on the battlefield the Byzantine army was in full flight but, despite laments by Byzantines and claims by Muslim chroniclers, the army's losses in killed and wounded were relatively light. The worst fighting had been concentrated in one area, though it is also likely that many Byzantine troops were cut down as they struggled to get within the temporary safety of Manzikert. Ibn al-Qalanisi's perhaps inflated claim was that, 'Many of the Byzantine troops were killed, to such an extent that a valley there where the two sides had met was filled [with corpses].'

Bryennios recorded that, 'The entire camp was seized along with the Imperial tent, the treasure and the most beautiful of the Imperial jewels, among them the famous pearl known as The Orphan.' Yet the loss of Byzantine prestige was worse, as Michael Attaleiates made clear: 'What could be more piteous than for the entire Imperial army to be driven away in flight and defeat by savage and relentless barbarians and the Emperor, helpless, to be surrounded by barbarian weapons, and for the tents of the Emperor, the commanders, and soldiers also to be possessed by men such as these and for the whole Roman state to be seen as ruined, and the empire as all but collapsing?' Bryennios concluded: 'The survivors of the battle dispersed in all directions, each one hastening to return to his own country.'

For the Saljuq army this perhaps unexpected triumph undoubtedly brought in vast booty, while the pursuit itself lasted all night. Presumably this was why Romanos was taken by a man who had seemingly lost his horse and was not presented to Alp Arslan until the Sultan had returned to camp the following day. Night also helped the fleeing Byzantines, while others found refuge inside Manzikert, which closed its gates to the victorious Saljuqs. An otherwise inexplicable statement by the Arab chronicler Kamal al-Din Ibn al-'Adim claimed that part of the battle was fought near Tolotaph; namely Doghodaph, which was a short distance east of Xinis [Hinis]. If there is any truth in this, it may indicate that the Saljuq pursuit of the fleeing Byzantines reached that point where the road north-westward from Manzikert crossed a significant tributary of the Murat River.

The number of commanders and officers captured in the battle was clearly significant and it has been suggested that as many as 20 per cent of the total troops may have been captured, though the majority were later released. The rearguard and reserve units under Andronikos Dukas escaped virtually unscathed and made their way back to the Imperial capital of Constantinople,

Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km (0.62 mile)



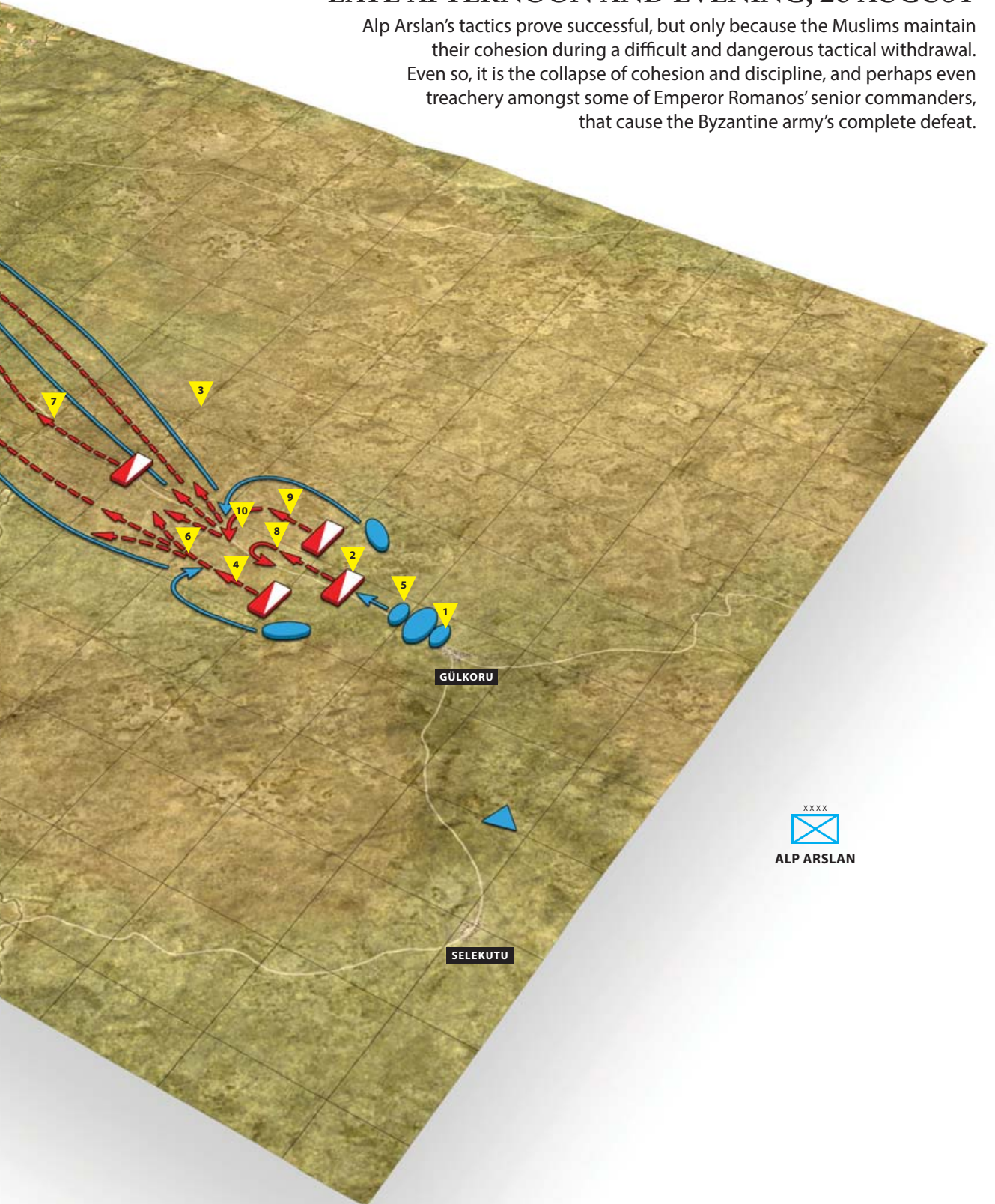
EVENTS

- 1 After Friday prayers, Sultan Alp Arslan prepares his army for a counter-attack.
- 2 Byzantine advance continues until dusk; Romanos orders a halt.
- 3 The dust abates.
- 4 Romanos orders a withdrawal but his signal is misinterpreted, especially on the right wing.
- 5 Saljuq scouts report Byzantine confusion; Alp Arslan orders an immediate counter-attack; his *askar* heading for the Byzantine Imperial standard.
- 6 Byzantine right wing crumbles, is surrounded and flees.
- 7 Byzantine rearguard retreats, causing panic elsewhere.
- 8 Romanos halts the withdrawal but his order is widely ignored.

- 9 Byzantine left wing under Nikephoros Bryennios attempts to support the right but is surrounded, perhaps by Saljuq reserves, and retreats.
- 10 Byzantine centre starts to withdraw, apparently in order; Romanos and the men closest to him make a stand but he is captured.
- 11 Mounting panic in the Byzantine camp.
- 12 Many Byzantine units flee westward.
- 13 Saljuqs surround Byzantine camp.
- 14 Some Byzantine troops take refuge in Manzikert.
- 15 Saljuqs overrun the fortified camp.
- 16 Fleeing Byzantine troops are pursued until late Saturday; Alp Arslan returns to the Saljuq camp by Saturday night.

THE TURKISH COUNTER-ATTACK, LATE AFTERNOON AND EVENING, 26 AUGUST

Alp Arslan's tactics prove successful, but only because the Muslims maintain their cohesion during a difficult and dangerous tactical withdrawal. Even so, it is the collapse of cohesion and discipline, and perhaps even treachery amongst some of Emperor Romanos' senior commanders, that cause the Byzantine army's complete defeat.





The foothills south-east of Manzikert were ideal for hiding large ambush forces. (Author's photograph)

as did most of the right wing under Nikephoros Bryennios the Elder. Several of its units were recorded campaigning against Pechenegs and Balkan Slavs the following year. Many troops from the shattered right wing also escaped, the Cappadocian *tagmata* seemingly withdrawing intact as did some elite units, which had been with the Emperor Romanos in the central division. Many subsequently gathered at the important fortress of Dokeia [Tokat].

In fact it has been calculated that between 5 to 10 per cent of those troops who took an active part in the battle of Manzikert fell,

most of them having been around the Emperor, including large numbers of Armenian infantry. Even the *tagma* of the *Stratelatai*, which was not mentioned again after Manzikert, may have been disbanded rather than destroyed. Named casualties included the Armenian noblemen Khatap and Vasilak, according to Matthew of Edessa, though Khatap may simply have disappeared from the chronicles. Amongst the civilians who died was the senior bureaucrat Eustratios Choirosphaktes. Another was Leon, the *epi ton deseon* or official responsible for receiving and answering petitions to the Emperor. As nephew of the archbishop of Patras in Greece, he was also a respected man of great culture and firm supporter of Romanos Diogenes as Emperor.

THE CAPTIVE EMPEROR

The varied accounts of Romanos' capture continue with differing accounts of his captivity. For example Sibte al-Jawzi claims that the senior Saljuq officer, Sa'd al-Dawla Gawhara'in went to Alp Arslan and said: 'One of my *ghulams* has taken the king of Byzantium prisoner', while Ibn al-Jawzi recorded that the sultan doubted this claim. So he sent a *ghulam* named Shadhi who had met the Emperor Romanos during the course of previous negotiations. Shadhi returned and announced: 'It is he', despite the fact that, according to Michael Attaleiates, Romanos was now in the 'shabby costume of an ordinary soldier'. Al-Husayni claimed that the *ghulam* who had captured Romanos tied the Emperor's hands before dragging him to the Sultan's camp and, on the way, 'Not one of the Byzantine prisoners saw him without sticking his [own] forehead in the dust.'

The Andalusian chronicler al-Turtushi added: 'The king of Byzantium was brought into the presence of Alp Arslan with a rope round his neck.' Sultan Alp Arslan was in his tent with a falcon and a hunting dog when Romanos was brought before him. According to Ibn al-'Adim, the Armenian Nikephoros Basilakes, who had been captured at the start of the battle, was also there and reportedly fell to his knees in tears. The 'Abbasid envoy Ibn al-Muhallaban similarly confirmed the prisoner's identity.

Al-Husayni further wrote: 'The chamberlain seized him [Romanos] by the hair and chest and threw him down to the ground so that he should kiss it, but he did not kiss it in the presence of the sultan because he was carried away by the pride of kingship.' Nevertheless, Alp Arslan ordered them to leave the Emperor be and, in Michael Attaleiates' words, the Sultan said:

‘Do not be afraid, O emperor, but be hopeful... since you will encounter no bodily harm but will be honoured in a manner worthy of the pre-eminence of your power. For foolish is he who is not cautious before the unexpected reversal of luck.’

In the meantime, Bar Hebraeus and Ibn al-Jawzi agreed: ‘The Sultan gave orders quickly, and they pitched a great royal tent for [Romanos] Diogenes and took him there. And they put iron fetters on his hands and round his neck, and set one hundred Turks to keep guard over him.’ Not surprisingly, news that the Byzantine Emperor had been captured caused jubilation in the Saljuq camp but, in Michael Attaleiates’ opinion, the Turks attributed their success to God ‘as they had accomplished a greater victory than they could have under their own strength’.

The still unnamed *ghulam* who actually captured Romanos naturally asked for a reward, but here the reports, while agreeing factually, present an account that hardly makes sense unless the ill-regarded and ‘lowly’ *ghulam* was tricked by his superiors. Ibn al-Jawzi recorded that the man gave a personal account of the affair to the Sultan who gave him the traditional highly valuable ‘robe of honour’ and then asked what reward he wanted. The man, perhaps foolishly, is said to have asked for the governorship of Ghazna in Afghanistan. Al-Husayni maintains that it was given to him – but Ghazna was capital of the rival Ghaznawid Sultanate and was never ruled by the Saljuqs. In fact history shows that, after Ibrahim Ibn Ma’sud acceded to the throne in Ghazna in 1059, there was half a century of relative peace between Ghaznawids and Saljuqs. Might the man have asked for command of an unrecorded and unsuccessful expedition against Ghazna, or did those who reported the conversation mishear the name of the governorship requested? As far as is known, the captor of Romanos now disappeared from history.

Despite Alp Arslan’s promise of good treatment, some ritual humiliation was thought necessary, so the Sultan struck him three or four blows with his hand and kicked him a similar number of times. The Sultan also criticized Romanos for having refused an offer of peace and what he regarded as the Emperor’s tactical errors. Al-Jawzi wrote that Romanos replied, pointing out that he had spent a great deal of money assembling a huge army, had superior numbers and what he thought was the upper hand, so it would have been impossible for him to go home without trying to do something ‘but the victory was yours. So do what you want and stop rebuking me.’

When asked what he would have done had victory been his, the Emperor judged that honesty was the best policy, answering according to some: ‘Do you doubt that I would have killed you?’ According to others: ‘I would have put you with dogs with a lead collar [round your neck].’ To which Alp Arslan replied, according to Ibn al-Jawzi: ‘He has spoken truthfully, by God! If he had said otherwise, he would be lying. This is an intelligent, strong man. It is not fitting that he should be killed.’

A different version of this encounter has the Sultan saying: ‘You are too trivial in my view for me to kill you. Take him and sell him to the person who pays most’, after which Romanos had to endure further humiliation for a while, being offered for sale as a slave amongst the other prisoners. Al-Turtushi says that the Emperor was exchanged for a dog and that the dog and Romanos were then brought back into the Sultan’s presence, Alp Arslan



A Turkish horse archer shooting rearwards towards a cavalry pursuer, on a 12th-century Byzantine silver and bronze bowl. (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)



A 12th-century Saljuq carved relief found in the Citadel of Ahlat during archaeological excavations led by Professor Emin Bilgiç. (Archaeological Museum, Ankara)

giving the dog back to its original owner, himself taking charge of the prisoner. These rituals completed, Emperor Romanos was released. Alp Arslan similarly sold some of the other senior Byzantine officers and gave others to his own senior followers.

Clearly Alp Arslan saw his captive as a valuable diplomatic asset. Once the symbolic punishment was over, he asked the Byzantine Emperor what he, Romanos, thought might be his fate. The Emperor replied that he might be executed, or paraded through the Sultan's domains, or he might be sent back to Constantinople as an ally though he thought the latter unlikely. Whether the speech recorded in Sibt al-Jawzi's chronicle is accurate or not, its main point was clear: 'Pardoning me, accepting money [ransom] and the treaty, dealing kindly with me, handing me back to my kingdom as a *mamluk* of yours and of some of your commanders and being your deputy

in Byzantium, for your killing me will not be of any use to you. They [the Byzantines] will merely appoint somebody else.' According to Bar Hebraeus, Alp Arslan claimed that this was what he planned to do anyway.

The Saljuq Sultan's initial demand for a ransom of ten million gold coins was impossibly high according to Sibt al-Jawzi who probably had access to the official report of these negotiations that was subsequently sent to the 'Abbasid Caliph's court. A sum of half a million plus 360,000 in annual tribute was eventually agreed. Romanos now pointed out he would have to go to Constantinople in person to ensure this agreement was fulfilled, and that he was likely to be deposed if he did not reappear soon. In this the Emperor was entirely correct. Furthermore he agreed to release all Muslim prisoners in Byzantine hands and not to interfere in the lands of Islam in the future.

Romanos' treasure had of course been lost in the sacking of the Byzantine camp but, having returned to the tent provided for him, he managed to raise a loan of 10,000 dinars, which he distributed to his remaining retinue. He is also said to have 'sold a group of his generals and given others away', perhaps in reality leaving them as hostages. A final symbolic act seems to have been when Alp Arslan gave back the Emperor's cloak and hat, and put earrings on his ears, symbolizing that Romanos was now one of his servants or vassals. It is interesting to note that almost two centuries later Lu'lu, the Turkish ruler of Mosul, took his life in his hands by similarly placing rings on the ears of Genghis Khan's grandson Hülegü, the Mongol conqueror of Iraq. This he did to fulfil a boast made before the Mongols overran Mosul, and in the hope that the Mongols did not know that such rings were an ancient sign of servitude in the Middle East. Fortunately for the *atabeg* and for Mosul, he was correct.

Other terms of the eventual treaty between Alp Arslan and Romanos were the handing over to Saljuq rule of Antioch, Edessa, Hieropolis [Manbij] and Manzikert. Romanos even agreed that, if necessary, he would send troops to force the garrisons of these places to leave. In the event, civil war erupted in the Byzantine Empire before the first three places were handed over. Instead the Saljuqs had to fight for them, and where Antioch was concerned this would take a long time. Manzikert and Ahlat were then formally transferred from the Marwanid *amirate* to the Saljuq Sultanate. These were the Saljuqs' only immediate territorial gains but they ensured the Sultan's strategic

domination of the region north of Lake Van at a time when Alp Arslan's main preoccupation remained the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt and Syria.

There was even talk of a marriage alliance between their children, though of course this never happened. Yet the chroniclers do agree that, by the time Romanos was released, he and Alp Arslan were behaving like friends. The Emperor and 'as many Romans as he asked for and ambassadors drawn from his close associates', in the words of Michael Attaleiates, were released eight days after the battle of Manzikert. Alp Arslan and his entourage escorted the party for a *parasang* (a league or approximately 5km, not to be confused with the modern Iranian *parasang* of 6km). Then, refusing to allow Romanos to humble himself in front of his men, the Sultan gave him an escort of two *amirs*, one hundred *ghulams* and a banner bearing the Muslim declaration of faith, 'There is no god but God. Muhammad is the Prophet of God.' This symbolized that the Emperor was now the vassal of a Muslim ruler – not something which would make Romanos' position within the Byzantine Empire any easier.

Alp Arslan also received a letter of congratulation from the 'Abbasid Caliph, addressing him as: 'The son, the most lofty, supported, assisted, victorious lord, the most mighty Sultan, the possessor of the Arabs and the non-Arabs, the lord of the kings of nations, the light of religion, the support of the Muslims, the helper of the *imam*, the refuge of mankind, the support of the victorious state, the crown of the resplendent community, the sultan of the lands of the Muslims, the proof of the Commander of the Faithful.'

With such titles ringing in his ears, Alp Arslan led his army back to Azarbayjan. In fact Ibn al-'Adim and al-Bundari maintain that this march began while Romanos was still a prisoner. It would indeed have been unusual for a victorious army to remain on a battlefield scattered with the corpses of men and horses in the height of summer. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the Saljuqs did not attack Manzikert, which remained a safe haven until it was handed over following the release of Emperor Romanos IV. Its contents were then added to the already vast booty, which Muslims had won when the Byzantine camp was overrun, from ransoms and from the sale of lower-ranking prisoners as slaves.

Several sources maintain that the booty from the camp was so huge that the Turks could not take it all with them. Instead the people of Ahlat and those who now returned to Manzikert seized what the Saljuq army could not carry. Some of this treasure was reportedly still seen in the two towns a century later. According to Ibn al-Azraq al-Fariqi, 'they distributed amongst themselves the gold and silver in *ratls* [units of 1.85 kilos, according to the medieval Syrian measure probably used in that area]. The inhabitants of Ahlat and Manzikert plundered from their [the Byzantines'] possessions enough to keep them rich until now [writing in the mid-12th century], for they went out, stayed with the army, fought and took most of the plunder. From that year the people of Ahlat were rich and became possessors of wealth.' Al-Bundari similarly wrote: 'The values of riding animals, beasts, weapons and commodities fell until twelve helmets were sold for a sixth of a dinar, and three coats of mail for a dinar.'



Byzantine forces that had been defeated by the Saljuqs outside Ahlat fled westward, finding refuge in the citadel of Muş. (Author's photograph)

AFTERMATH

ROMANOS RETURNS

During Emperor Romanos' brief captivity, the Byzantine authorities attempted to maintain order and assemble those who had escaped the disaster, both civilian administrators and soldiers. Most of the court had escaped and made their way to Trebizond, from where they probably took ship for Constantinople. The *proedrus* Paul, who had been recalled from his command in Edessa, took over the vital frontier fortress of Theodosiopolis whose *dux* had been captured. This he did without explicit Imperial authority while the Norman mercenary Hervé Phrangopoulos may have taken temporary command of the remaining eastern forces while Romanos and his senior commanders were held captive. More important, however, were events in Constantinople where the Empress Eudocia's son was now proclaimed Emperor as Michael Dukas VII.

Some of those then released with Romanos hurried to re-establish themselves, including the judge Basil Maleses who joined forces with Roussel de Bailleul. Perhaps those who always opposed Romanos Diogenes did not expect him to be released so soon – if at all – while many modern historians have assumed Alp Arslan's freeing of the Emperor was intended to stir up civil war in Byzantium. In reality the Saljuq Sultan cannot have known, within the eight days in which he held Romanos, that Michael Dukas would be raised up as his replacement. It is just as likely that Alp Arslan hoped to

The 'Court of King Abenner' in a Byzantine manuscript of *Barlaam and Joasaph* made between 1075 and 1125. (Monastery of Iveron, Cod. 463, Mount Athos)



reach an accommodation with the Byzantine Emperor so that he could concentrate on his primary aim of dominating the Islamic Middle East.

The Byzantine Empire still had large numbers of troops, most of those units involved in the recent battle having escaped relatively unscathed. These were, even now, making their way to various Byzantine citadels while the substantial Byzantine forces in northern Syria had hardly contributed to the Manzikert campaign and were therefore still in place.



Romanos' first action was to pay what he had promised Alp Arslan, starting with 200,000 dinars from the citadel of Dokeia, which he gave to the Saljuq *amirs* who accompanied him. They then returned to the Sultan, leaving Romanos free to decide his next move. In Dokeia were many units that had escaped from the battle so the unseated Emperor had an army again. The *dux* of Antioch, Katchatourios, also supported Romanos.

As a deposed Emperor, Romanos knew he would be in great danger if he did not regain the throne so, in the words of a Byzantine chronicler: 'When a crowd of soldiers had flocked to him, he marched with his entire army to ... Amasea.' Michael Attaleiates may have been correct in judging that Romanos made a major error in not immediately marching to Constantinople, instead building up his military strength. The resulting campaign – the first in a series that would almost bring the Byzantine Empire to its knees – did not go well for Romanos. His ally Theodore Alyates, who now led those Cappadocian troops supporting Romanos, was defeated, imprisoned and blinded. Then Romanos Diogenes was defeated at Sebastea and again at Adana where he surrendered on condition he would be allowed to live out the rest of his life as a monk. Blinded and then denied medical attention, the rest of his life as a monk proved painfully short, Romanos Diogenes dying in a monastery in July 1072.

After the Saljuq Turkish conquest of the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire, some Armenian monasteries were rebuilt and even enlarged, one example being Surb Bartolomeos, close to what is now the Iranian frontier. (Author's photograph)

THE DEATH OF ALP ARSLAN

Alp Arslan died less than four months later. Immediately after releasing Romanos, he appointed governors for Ahlat and Manzikert, which now passed from Marwanid to Saljuq control, then returned to Azarbayjan. Several commanders remained in Armenia to watch the Byzantine frontier and, as the Empire fell apart, some went on to carve out territories for themselves. From Azarbayjan the Sultan proceeded to Hamadan and Rayy.

The Saljuqs' unexpected victory was celebrated across the Sunni Islamic world, if not the Shi'a, being equated with early Muslim triumphs at Yarmouk and Qadisiyah during the 7th century AD. Alp Arslan, however, had pressing matters to deal with, most immediately a rebellion by one of his subordinates in Transoxania and rumbling conflict with the Western Qarakhanid Khan. Assembling a huge army, Alp Arslan crossed the Amu Darya River intending to attack Samarkand, but this never happened. Instead the Sultan was diverted to deal with Yusuf al-Harani, the reportedly Kurdish rebel commander of a minor fortress.

Perhaps over-eager to press on against his Qarakhanid enemy, Alp Arslan gained the governor's submission by promising the rebel 'perpetual ownership of his lands'. When Yusuf al-Harani was brought before him, the Sultan ordered that he be shot, but before the archers could raise their bows Yusuf seized a knife and threw himself at Alp Arslan, striking three blows before being slain. Four days later on 24 November 1072 Alp Arslan died and was buried at Marw, having designated his 18-year-old son Malik Shah as his successor. Nevertheless, the Saljuq Sultanate was plunged into civil war before Malik Shah could consolidate his position.

THE FALL OF ANATOLIA

The Byzantine or 'Roman' Empire, as it regarded itself, had for centuries been seen as a permanent factor in world affairs. But the capture of an Emperor seriously undermined Byzantine prestige throughout the Middle East and much of Europe. Even within the Empire, the self-satisfied image that the Byzantines had of themselves began to be questioned. Worse still was the resulting and prolonged Byzantine civil war. Revolt seemed to follow revolt and it was these years of chaos that really drained the military and financial capabilities of the Byzantine Empire.

While the Byzantine Empire was tearing itself apart, the Türkmen tribes took full advantage. Most military historians maintain that the Byzantines should have lost only the Armenian uplands as a result of Manzikert, there being no particular reason why the Empire should not have re-established the defensible frontier that had existed before the Byzantine conquests of the 10th century. This did not, of course, happen. Instead the Türkmen broke through that mountain frontier onto the high plateau of central Anatolia where they found a territory that was ideally suited to their own pastoral, upland way of life.

Whereas Alp Arslan had been largely unable to prevent previous Türkmen raiding, in 1072 he and his successor Malik Shah apparently urged some tribes into Anatolia where they would not only cease to be a problem for the Saljuq Sultanate but might extend it further. According to Matthew of Edessa, Alp Arslan announced: 'Henceforth all of you be like lion cubs and eagle young, racing through the countryside day and night, slaying the Christians and not sparing any mercy on the Roman nation.'

THE BATTLEFIELDS TODAY

At the time of writing Syria is off limits for tourists, though the northern regions which were involved in the Manzikert campaign used to be amongst the easiest to visit. Alp Arslan also assembled his army in north-western Iran, a country which is far more straightforward to visit than is generally realized.

Most of the Manzikert campaign was, however, fought within Turkey. Byzantine preparations were made, and its army assembled in and around Constantinople – now Istanbul – which remains one of the world's major tourist destinations. Eastern Turkey receives less tourist attention, which is a shame for this is an exceptionally interesting region, culturally, historically and scenically. It is also well provided with transport and hotels. Nevertheless, outside the main centres, eastern Turkey can seem primitive to the unadventurous traveller. For example, while Van has hotels in all categories and a large array of restaurants, one has to travel only a few kilometres to find things much more basic. A self-drive car is the best way to get around though some of the minor roads remain 'exciting'.

The Manzikert campaign focused upon the towns of Malazgirt [Manzikert] and Ahlat. The former has adequate hotels and restaurants, but the latter is poorly endowed with tourist facilities, despite its superb location on the shore of Lake Van. The battlefield of Manzikert has recently been marked by a monument called the 'Gateway to Anatolia', which, unlike some military monuments, seems to be in the correct location. The citadel and some of the fortified walls of Manzikert town were also restored to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the battle in 1971. Meanwhile the continuing tensions between Turks and Kurds, which too often result in violence, can be seen even amongst the business community of Malazgirt. Fortunately they tend to be restricted to friendly banter over numerous glasses of *raki*, the Turkish aniseed-flavoured spirit.



A modern statue of Alp Arslan dominates the road leading into Malazgirt, the medieval Manzikert. (Author's photograph)

In 1068 the Nestorian Church, which had flourished under Islamic rule for centuries, established a new bishopric at Urmiah and there is still a substantial Nestorian community in this part of north-western Iran, notably in Rezayah. (Author's photograph)



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OSPREY
PUBLISHING

First published in Great Britain in 2013 by Osprey Publishing,
Midland House, West Way, Botley, Oxford OX2 0PH, UK
43-01 21st Street, Suite 220B, Long Island City, NY 11101, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978 1 78096 503 1
E-book ISBN: 978 1 78096 504 8
E-pub ISBN: 978 1 78096 505 5

Editorial by Ilios Publishing Ltd, Oxford, UK (www.iliospublishing.com)
Index by Fionbar Lyons
Typeset in Myriad Pro and Sabon
Maps by Bounford.com
3D bird's-eye view by The Black Spot
Battlescene illustrations by Christa Hook
Originated by PDQ Media, Bungay, UK
Printed in China through Worldprint Ltd.

13 14 15 16 17 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DEDICATION

For Carole and Robert Hillenbrand

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